

Screen



Michael Powell centenary issue

Hitchcock and Powell

The Golden Years project

Two takes on *AMOLAD*

Three forms of the magus

Powell's Australian films

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Michael Powell centenary issue: introduction

SARAH STREET

This special issue of *Screen* marks the centenary of the birth of Michael Powell (1905-1990). Described by Julian Petley as 'one of the British cinema's few indisputable "auteurs" in the full sense of the term',¹ Powell remains perhaps the most highly regarded of any British director. His reputation has increased in stature since the 1970s when a major critical shift, promoted by Ian Christie and others, reevaluated the films he made with Emeric Pressburger under the strikingly prescient corporate emblem of 'The Archers': eight arrows having been shot into a target, a ninth thrusting into the bull's eye.² Indeed, in terms of critical reception, many of Powell's films were considered to be off-target, not easily assimilated within accepted traditions of a British cinema dominated in the 1940s by 'quality realism' or unprepared for the unmitigated horror of *Peeping Tom* (1960), a devastating film that seemed (literally) to pierce through, and expose, the very heart of cinema itself.³

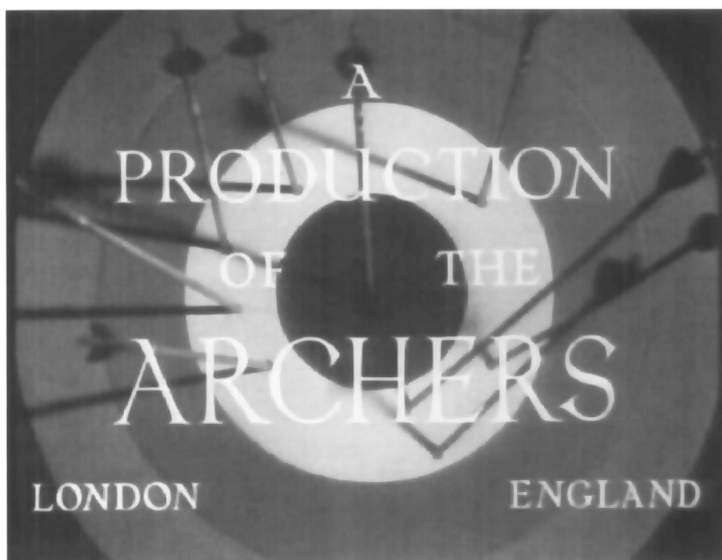
As with other identifiable auteurs, somewhat paradoxically Powell's name is associated with many controversial and contradictory elements that render problematical a singular identity: 'exotic', 'lyrical', 'English', 'European', 'Expressionist', 'neo-Romantic' and 'spectacular' are terms that will undoubtedly feature in other centenary appreciations. Yet the desire to herald Powell as an auteur has left its mark on scholarship about 'his' films, isolating them from other British films and styles with which there are strong affinities, and under-appreciating the complexity of his collaborations with Pressburger, cinematographer Jack Cardiff, set designer Alfred Junge, costume designer Hein Heckroth and the many striking screen performers with whom he worked.

1 Julian Petley in Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1986), p. 106.

2 Ian Christie (ed.), *Powell, Pressburger and Others* (London: British Film Institute, 1978).

3 For a discussion of this dominant critical standpoint, see John Ellis, 'Art, culture and quality: terms for a cinema in the forties and seventies', *Screen*, vol. 19, no. 3 (1978).

The Archers' bulls-eye logo.



- 4 Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies* (London: Heinemann, 1986) and *Million-Dollar Movie* (London: Heinemann, 1992).

While not denying the auteurist sympathies that are inevitably invited in a centenary collection, the essays in this issue of *Screen* reflect several revisionist critical approaches to, and new appraisals of, Powell's work. Charles Barr concentrates on the similarities between Powell and Hitchcock over many years, linked especially by their international connections and affinities that mark them as particularly distinctive filmmakers and enhance, paradoxically, their contribution to British cinema. Andrew Moor demonstrates how archival material expands our understanding of the complexities of autobiographical structures in Powell's films (including the unrealized project, *The Golden Years*, the focus of Moor's article) and in his reflective yet grandiose self-presentation in his controversial memoirs.⁴ James Chapman and Damian Sutton offer two very different perspectives on one of Powell's most celebrated films, *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946). Chapman provides a rereading of the film's critical reception, arguing for an appreciation of its relationship to contemporary social and political issues, as well as to the more often cited dominant realist aesthetic of the 1940s with which it was seen to be at odds. Chapman demonstrates that despite its fantastical premiss, there was very much an urgent sense of political realism in its frames, since *A Matter of Life and Death* can be related to debates about the postwar world, the foundation of the Welfare State and to Anglo-US relations. Writing from a very different conceptual and theoretical perspective, Sutton uses trauma theory to argue that the film presents an informed and fascinating study of the wounded returning serviceman. Not only is this experience rendered in medically accurate detail, but through its central device of 'stopping time' the film also offers a complex meditation on the operation of past and present as simultaneous coexistence, as theorized by philosophers

such as Bergson and Deleuze. These two different studies of the film attest to the rich potential of reexamining 'classic' texts that have already attracted a vast amount of critical attention, of reevaluating the sources on which canonical studies are based, and of turning to new perspectives and theories to illuminate facets that have hitherto been misunderstood or even ignored. Robert Murphy shifts the focus to a broader consideration of Powell based on a number of key films, highlighting the consistency of 'magus-like' male characters and raising the issue of gender representation in The Archers' films more generally. This theme is taken up in Jeanette Hoorn's study of *They're a Weird Mob* and *Age of Consent*, two films Powell made in Australia in the 1960s which have been overshadowed by his British films. She argues that in their different ways these films present an astute commentary on Australian national and, particularly, masculine identity during a time when Australia was experiencing profound social and cultural change. As an 'outsider' in the position of examining Australian national and gender identities from a distanced, at times satirical, perspective, Powell was able to produce two popular films that highlighted tensions within contemporary Australian culture.

The Reports and Debates section of this issue is related to current issues in British film policy and archives, but these are also relevant to the study of Michael Powell. As with other British production companies, The Archers was always subject to the vicissitudes of British film legislation. While for a time the company enjoyed a fair degree of protection and independence through distributing its films via Rank's General Film Distributors, Powell's tendency to exceed budgets and his 'maverick' reputation brought him into conflict with Rank on several occasions, exposing the plight of the independent filmmaker in an industry that was historically vulnerable to financial instability and US competition. Relevant to Wendy Everett's argument about the need to fully appreciate British cinema as part of European cinema, is the positioning of Powell's work as representative of an eclectic, expansive conception of 'British cinema' that drew inspiration from, and connected with, other national cinemas and deployed many technicians and performers from outside Britain. As a filmmaker whose first work was at studios in the south of France, and who notably used the Riviera as a key location in *The Red Shoes* (1948), it would be a mistake to relate Powell's *oeuvre* to a narrow understanding of British cinema, especially since Powell was described by Raymond Durnat as 'the upholder, through its lean years, of the Méliès tradition'.⁵

In relation to archives and developments in film archiving also described in Reports and Debates, the revival of interest in Powell's films since the 1970s led to a number of key films being restored and shown to new audiences via high-profile metropolitan retrospectives and DVD releases. In his commentary on the Criterion DVD of *Black Narcissus* (1947; DVD released 2000), for example, Martin Scorsese, one of Powell's most enthusiastic US admirers, remembers being

⁵ Durnat in Christie (ed.), *Powell, Pressburger and Others*, p. 73.

‘overwhelmed’ when he first saw a restored version of the film, revealing the full force of Jack Cardiff’s Technicolor cinematography that was particularly impressive in the flashback sequence in Ireland. This draws attention to the crucial work undertaken by archivists to ensure the preservation of film heritage, of taking advantage of the opportunities offered by new technology to undo the years of damage done by poor quality television broadcasts of films, and of desaturated, diffuse video copies. In these and other ways, the legacy of Michael Powell continues to be relevant to how we view, conceptualize and analyze what British cinema has been, and is today.

Hitchcock and Powell: two directions for British cinema

CHARLES BARR

1 By 'British film directors', I mean those who were British by birth and also made a solid block of British films, as opposed to incomers like Joseph Losey, or British-born directors like Charles Chaplin and James Whale who established their film careers elsewhere.

2 Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies* (London: Heinemann, 1986), pp. 185–90, 196–8 for the collaborations of the late 1920s, and pp. 518–19 for Hollywood 1945. Michael Powell, *Million Dollar Movie* (London: Heinemann, 1992), pp. 196–8 for the 1952 reunion. Both books have many other references to Hitchcock and his work.

3 François Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968).

The chart overleaf lays out, in parallel outline, the careers of the two most celebrated of British film directors, Michael Powell and Alfred Hitchcock.¹ The breaks in the dividing line indicate some points at which their paths crossed. Before becoming a director in his own right, Powell worked in minor capacities on three successive films that Hitchcock directed in the late 1920s, *Champagne* (1928), *The Manxman* (1929), and *Blackmail* (1929). In 1945, when Powell went to Hollywood along with his colleague Emeric Pressburger to cast the part of the US radio operator in *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), it was Hitchcock and his wife Alma Reville who welcomed and entertained them, and who solved their problem by suggesting Kim Hunter. In 1952 Powell was back in Hollywood, without Pressburger, on a more speculative mission, and had dinner at the Hitchcocks' home.

In his two-volume autobiography, all of these contacts are described vividly by Powell.² There are no complementary passages in the Hitchcock literature. Hitchcock did not write an autobiography – had he done so, it would have been a tight, cautious one, far from the generous, sprawling, self-revealing nature of Powell's. Neither in François Truffaut's interview book³ nor, as far as I know, anywhere else, did he make any acknowledgment of Powell or his work, which is consistent with his career-long reluctance to give credit to collaborators or to actual or potential rivals, particularly within the field of British cinema. The Hitchcock collection in the Margaret Herrick Library in Los Angeles holds what must be the last communication between them, a warm and wide-ranging handwritten letter of congratulation from Powell on the occasion of the American Film Institute's tribute to Hitchcock in

4 Hitchcock Collection, file 1156.
 5 Powell, *Million Dollar Movie*, p. 197.
 6 The first issue of the British magazine *Movie* in 1962 included a notorious 'talent histogram', ranking all current British and US directors in a scale of six categories. Hitchcock was in the top category, 'Great', while Powell was not even classed as 'Talented', being consigned to the fifth category, that of 'Competent or Ambitious'. *Movie* no. 1 (June 1962), p. 9. The launch of *Movie* made a big impact, and this undoubtedly helped to fix for some time the relative critical standing of these two – though ironically it was *Movie* which published a sympathetic article three years later: 'Michael Powell' by Raymond Durnat, using the pseudonym of O.O. Green, *Movie*, no. 14 (Autumn 1965).

ALFRED HITCHCOCK		MICHAEL POWELL	
	born 1899		born 1905
1920	enters industry		enters industry
	experience in German studios		experience in French studios
	director from 1925		
	director	CHAMPAGNE THE MANXMAN BLACKMAIL	various jobs
1930			director from 1931
1938	THE LADY VANISHES contract with Selznick goes to Hollywood		THE EDGE OF THE WORLD contract with Korda partnership with Pressburger
1940	anti-Nazi propaganda epic: FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT		anti-Nazi propaganda epic: 49TH PARALLEL
			independent company: The Archers
	by now: central figure in Hollywood		by now: central figure in British films
1945	(helps with casting of:)	A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH	
	independent company: Transatlantic		
1950			
1952		another reunion in Hollywood	
	prosperes in Hollywood major success in TV		declines in Britain
	VERTIGO		
1960	PSYCHO		PEEPING TOM
	critical celebrity		critical eclipse
			minor work in TV
1970	continues working		gets little work
	dies 1981		critical (and archival) restoration under way
			dies 1990

March 1979.⁴ One cannot imagine that ever happening reciprocally, Hitchcock to Powell. In terms of the two brave productions released in 1960, virtually twin films, which mark the closest parallel in their later careers, Powell's tribute to *Psycho* is on record, but Hitchcock's response to *Peeping Tom*, if he ever saw it, is not.⁵

At one level this one-sidedness is a problem. Powell could be diagnosed as just an eager junior with ideas above his station, tolerated and indulged by a superior talent – why should Hitchcock go out of his way to acknowledge him?⁶ In *A Life in Movies*, Powell claims that, after acting as stills cameraman for *Champagne* and *The Manxman*, he coscripted *Blackmail*, and suggested both the climactic British Museum

7 See, for instance, the death-fall from Westminster Cathedral in *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), and the death-fall from the Statue of Liberty at the climax of *Saboteur* (1942). Powell and Pressburger's films in turn have multiple climactic death-falls, prefiguring *Vertigo*: those of *Black Narcissus* (1947), *The Red Shoes* (1948), and *Gone to Earth* (1950). There is also the miraculous survival from a long fall at the start of *A Matter of Life and Death*.

8 Conference of the German Association of English Teachers, University of Bayreuth, 29 September to 2 October 2002. Proceedings published in Ewald Mengel, Hans-Jörg Schmid and Michael Steppat (eds), *Anglistentag 2002 Bayreuth* (Bayreuth: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2003).

9 For tributes to Lang, see Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p. 24; Powell, *A Life in Movies*, pp. 516–17.

10 For Hitchcock and Murnau, see for instance Patrick McGilligan, *Alfred Hitchcock: a Life in Darkness and Light* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2003), pp. 63–4. Powell's interviews and writings are studded with references to the formative influence of Rex Ingram; his apprenticeship with him in France in the mid 1920s is described in *A Life in Movies*, pp. 117 ff.

11 Powell, *A Life in Movies*, p. 189.

location and the final death-fall of the blackmailer through its glass roof – two elements (famous landmark, and fall from a height) that Hitchcock would later use repeatedly.⁷ Yet his name appears nowhere on the credits of either the silent or the sound version of *Blackmail*, nor do I know of other firm evidence of his input. How does the historian steer a path between the Hitchcock line – downplaying all collaborators, even in this case the author of the original play, Charles Bennett, as if essentially he did it all himself, with some assistance from Alma – and the Powell line, which quotes conversations verbatim fifty-five years after the event, and which may, just possibly, lean towards exaggeration? But contrasts like this are an integral part of the fascinating overall pattern of their parallel, sometimes interwoven, stories.

An earlier version of this essay was given as a paper to a German audience in September 2002.⁸ The original motive for the choice of topic was the fact that both Hitchcock and Powell, probably more than any of their British contemporaries, had strong connections with, and affection for, Germany, but the value of the comparison surely transcends this local dimension. Hitchcock worked in Germany as an art director on Anglo-German coproductions by Michael Balcon's Gainsborough Pictures, and his first two films as a director, *The Pleasure Garden* (1925) and *The Mountain Eagle* (1926), were made there; one of Powell's last films, *Bluebeard's Castle* (1964), was shot in Germany, and Hitchcock returned soon after that for *Torn Curtain* (1966). Both men acknowledged the formative early influence of German directors like Fritz Lang.⁹ Both made propaganda films around the start of World War II which are strongly anti-Nazi but in no way anti-German. The characters played by Conrad Veidt in Powell's *A Spy in Black* (1939) and by Herbert Marshall in Hitchcock's *Foreign Correspondent* (1940) are presented as, at root, men of honour whose loyalty to their own country is understandable. The strongest anti-Nazi sentiments in Powell's subsequent war films *49th Parallel* (1941) and *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) are spoken not by patriotic Englishmen but by Germans, played each time by Anton Walbrook, in speeches that are long and passionate, and remain powerfully affecting even today.

This lack of narrow insularity, this international dimension, is one of the attributes that makes the contribution of both men to British cinema so distinctive. Hitchcock's early experience in German studios, where he famously watched F.W. Murnau at work on *The Last Laugh* (1924), is matched – as the chart indicates – by Powell's extensive apprenticeship in France, working in Nice with the exiled Irish-born Hollywood director Rex Ingram.¹⁰ Here is Powell on Hitchcock again, looking back to their first meetings:

Like me, Hitch adored films and had great ambitions. Like me, Hitch was impatient with the men who financed the struggling British film industry, who looked inward instead of outward. For Hitch as for me, the whole world was our audience, or we failed.¹¹

¹² To pick just one out of Grierson's many articulations of this point: 'Our British documentary group began not so much in affection for film as in affection for national education. If I am to be counted as the founder and leader of the movement, its origins certainly lie in sociological rather than aesthetic aims'. From his essay 'The course of realism', first published in Charles Davy (ed.), *Footnotes to the Film* (London: Readers' Union, 1938), p. 153.

¹³ For the 'composed film', see Powell's account of the planning of *Black Narcissus* in *A Life in Movies*, pp. 581–4; Hitchcock outlined his concept of 'pure cinema' to Truffaut in discussing silent cinema generally and later in discussing *Rear Window*. Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, pp. 49, 181.

Already this separates them from other important and honourable figures in British cinema, some of whom do look inward, making a positive virtue of being insular (much of the output of Ealing Studios is relevant here), and some of whom do not especially 'adore films', or at least do not foreground in that way a fascination with the medium as such. John Grierson, founder of the British documentary movement, always argued that the social message was the important thing and that cinema was simply the most convenient medium for conveying it.¹² Ken Loach likewise, today, remains bracingly scornful of any talk of the art of the cinema; he would hardly claim to 'love films' or to 'love cinema'. Both Powell and Hitchcock, in turn, were scornful of documentary and its self-imposed limitations, and of British social realism. Hitchcock's ideal, as is well known, was 'pure cinema'. Powell's ideal was the 'composed film'.¹³ The two terms seem to refer to something comparable: visual narrative with little or no dialogue, freely edited sequences composed rhythmically, almost on musical principles, and often integrated with strong musical soundtracks – such as Powell's opera and ballet films, and Hitchcock's collaborations with Bernard Herrmann.

For both men, their sense of film as an art, and of themselves as artists, and their opposition to notions of documentary objectivity, made it natural for them to be ready to 'sign' their own films with personal appearances, and these appearances repay detailed analysis. Hitchcock's are well known; Powell's are less so and less frequent, but equally interesting, from *The Edge of the World* (1938) onward.

This late 1930s period is the major turning-point in the career of both men. Hitchcock, six years older, is by 1938 already well established, with a strong authorial profile, and becoming identified with the suspense thriller; already, one can say, recognizably 'Hitchcock'. Powell is in contrast not yet well known, nor is he identified with any special themes or style. He is not yet recognizably 'Powell', partly because he has not yet found his great collaborator Emeric Pressburger. He has been making films prolifically for most of the 1930s, but *The Edge of the World* is his first film of real ambition, his own project, written by him, financed independently, and shot entirely on the remote island of Foula off the northern tip of Scotland.

It starts with a tourist couple arriving on a yacht, at a deserted island. The man identifies it on the map, and tells their guide that they will stop there and have a look. The guide is reluctant, but is told firmly that they will risk it. When they land, the guide starts to tell them the story of the island's recent history, leading to its evacuation, and the film goes into flashback. While the guide/narrator is played by an actor, Niall McGinnis, the yachtsman is Michael Powell himself, and the woman is Frankie Reidy, later to be his wife. John Grierson and his documentary associates were by then operating also as critics, very influential ones, and tried to claim *The Edge of the World* as documentary, shot as it was on location, dealing with real

¹⁴ The influential documentarist and film historian Paul Rotha wrote in praise of *The Edge of the World* in 1938 and subsequently, describing it as 'of the documentary school': see *Rotha on The Film* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958), pp. 214, 256. For Powell's opposition to documentary, see *A Life in Movies* pp. 241, 532.

¹⁵ Michael Powell, *The Edge of the World* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990), originally published as *200,000 Feet on Foula* (London: Faber & Faber, 1938).

¹⁶ C.A. Lejeune, *The Observer*, 7 August 1960 (*Psycho*) and *The Observer*, 10 April 1960 (*Peeping Tom*).

social issues of deprivation and depopulation. But Powell resented and disputed this, and it is easy to see why.¹⁴ The story itself, framed in the long flashback, is unashamedly melodramatic. It is narrated not by the traditional neutral 'voice of God' commentary of documentary but by one of the main participants. And it is introduced by the visiting yachtsman and wife, who act as a kind of surrogate for the curious audience, being introduced to this exotic place and then settling down to be told about it. It is not an objective piece of documentary, but a story into which the audience and the primary narrator, Powell himself, are inscribed at the start.

This film did make Powell known. It was well received, as was his book about the adventure of its production.¹⁵ It was seen by the dominant impresario of British cinema, Alexander Korda, who gave him a contract, and soon introduced him to a screenwriter also under contract to him, Emeric Pressburger, with whom Powell would work closely for most of the next twenty years.

Hitchcock's career too was being transformed at the same time. After *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) he signed the contract with David O. Selznick that took him to Hollywood, the very first British director to go there on the strength of directing British films. His personal appearance at the end of that film is a low-key one – he passes by on the station platform – but his appearance in its predecessor, *Young and Innocent* (1937), is more pointed. He is a press photographer, standing outside the magistrate's court, who fails through comically clumsy ineptitude to get a photograph of the film's protagonist (Derrick de Marney) when he escapes from custody under his nose. This can be contrasted with Powell's recruitment film for the Fleet Air Arm, *The Volunteer* (1944). At its end, the hero goes to Buckingham Palace to receive a medal from the King, and, as he exits proudly, a photographer, Powell himself, darts forward to take a low-angle shot, which then constitutes the film's final image. The contrast between Hitchcock, large and immobile, and Powell, slim and active, is comically striking, yet their signing of their own films as men with cameras is an unmissable link. Moving forward to 1960, there is another link that is almost uncanny, between their signature appearances in *Psycho* and in *Peeping Tom*.

These are, as noted above, virtually twin films. Shot in late 1959, on low budgets, they centre on handsome and likeable young men who have been emotionally crippled in childhood and become serial killers, and they immediately offered similar challenges to censors and to critics through their graphic portrayal of violence against women and of twisted sexuality. The veteran English critic C.A. (Caroline) Lejeune, writing in *The Observer*, reviewed Powell's film in April 1960 and Hitchcock's in August, and applied to both the adjective 'bestial'.¹⁶ Both, of course, now have a classic status as groundbreaking films made at a time of big changes in the industry, with an intense personal commitment exemplified by the directors' appearances.

Hitchcock stands outside an office, wearing a big hat, seen by a camera that looks out from the space of the office towards the door. Pan left to show a secretary. Cut back to show the door, as another man enters from the space which Hitchcock just now occupied, his suit and hat similar to Hitchcock's own. Pan left to the same secretary, from whom the man quickly moves on to another, more glamorous one, played by Janet Leigh, already established as the lead character. The man, with a leeringly intimate emphasis, tells her about his sorrow that today 'my sweet little baby – no, not you – my sweet little baby's getting married away from me'. She edges away from him, takes the money he is depositing, pleads illness, and goes off ostensibly to bank the money – the main narrative of *Psycho* is under way.

Summing up, then: pan from Hitchcock to the secretary, then the entry of Hitchcock's double, with whom we pan from the secretary to, as it were, her double, for the quasi-incestuous conversation. And the secretary, the first and less prominent one, is played by Hitchcock's own daughter, Patricia. It is as if the two doubles are playing out an exchange that could be theirs.

In *Peeping Tom*, the killer-protagonist, Mark Lewis, has a collection of home movies, some of which record the influence on him as a young boy of his domineering psychiatrist father. He shows some of them to his female tenant (Anna Massey). The films relentlessly record the death of the mother, the father's remarriage, the father's gift to him of a camera, the father's experiments in frightening him. The father is played by Michael Powell, the boy by his own son, Columba.

Here are two films in whose main narrative the central parent-child relationship is seen to have gone spectacularly wrong, and to have bred murderous neurosis. Clearly the films, and their directors, are very aware of Freud; Hitchcock had made one film specifically about psychoanalysis in *Spellbound* (1945), while *Peeping Tom* itself was made when a project about Freud fell through.¹⁷ And both directors go so far as to make a personal appearance alongside their own child, as if to underline the sense that these nightmare stories have their roots in an exaggerated version of very basic and everyday kinds of family relationship, family romance, family tension. Typically, Powell's signature is more upfront, less cryptic.

Interestingly, Hitchcock and Powell did not just put themselves and their children on screen, but their dogs as well, a love of which is something else they had in common. At the start of *The Birds* (1963) Hitchcock leads his two small dogs out of a pet shop. Powell's dogs are spaniels, bigger and rougher, and they do not go on leads – echoing the contrast between the passive and active director-cameramen glimpsed in *Young and Innocent* and *The Volunteer* (1944). They appear unobtrusively in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (at the fireside, in the last elegiac scene with Blimp's wife before her offscreen death), and more prominently in *I Know Where I'm Going!* (at the Castle of Some, where they greet Joan Webster early in the morning before its occupants

17 Powell recalled his first meeting with screenwriter Leo Marks: 'I said why didn't we make a film about Freud? He said yes, why didn't we? It was one of those subjects I had always had at the back of my mind. He said he'd go away and think about it. A week later John Huston announced he was going to make a film about Freud in Munich.' So they made *Peeping Tom* instead. Powell, *Million Dollar Movie*, p. 386.

18 In *English Hitchcock* (Moffat: Cameron and Hollis, 1999), pp. 186–9, I discuss the various canine appearances in, especially, his pre-1940s films. An equally full account could be written in terms of Powell, taking in, for instance, the dogs of the island community in *The Edge of the World*, including the one that attends the death of its owner Peter Manson at the end, and the beautiful moment early in *A Matter of Life and Death* where the pilot, thinking he has died and gone to heaven, is greeted by a friendly black dog, and, as he pats it, says ‘I’d always hoped there would be dogs’. Dogs would indeed, one feels, be an essential element in both men’s concept of heaven.

19 Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual pleasure and narrative cinema’, *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1975), pp. 6–18.

20 Charles Barr, *Vertigo* (London: British Film Institute, 2002), pp. 14–15.

have surfaced), and again in its successor, *A Matter of Life and Death*. In the wonderful scene where we first meet Dr Reeves, and he first meets Kim Hunter, he is operating his camera obscura for the benefit of himself and, in the absence of other humans, his dogs, who respond with delightful intelligence.¹⁸

This camera obscura itself, being a means of voyeuristic observation and a precursor of cinema, is another example of the self-reflexiveness, the foregrounding of the apparatus of representation, that is typical of both of them; we may compare the various lenses of *Rear Window*, and the optical devices of many earlier Hitchcock films, and, above all, the way in which both *Peeping Tom* and *Vertigo* begin.

Even though *Peeping Tom* was made after the break-up of the partnership with Pressburger, it uses the familiar initial Archers motif of the arrow thudding into the centre of an archery target, as if into the iris of an eye. The words ‘A Michael Powell Production’ are followed immediately by the close up of an actual eye, closed: below the eyelid we can detect the rapid eye movement that suggests dreaming, then the eye opens suddenly, as if in shock. As the credits of *Vertigo* begin, the camera moves over the face of an unidentified woman, and – as Hitchcock’s name appears for the first time – into a closeup of the right eye, which opens wider, again as in shock; the remaining credits then emerge out of its depths. The woman is not Kim Novak, nor is it suggested that the eye in *Peeping Tom* belongs to the protagonist, Mark Lewis; the opening eye, in both, can be seen as representing the eye of character, director and spectator alike, announcing the theme of the ‘triple look’ at the heart of narrative cinema that would be theorized fifteen years later in Laura Mulvey’s influential article.¹⁹ Writing recently on *Vertigo* I suggested that, despite all the clear and deep links between *Peeping Tom* and *Psycho*:

the parallels between *Peeping Tom* and *Vertigo* are, while less obvious, in some ways even stronger. Hitchcock disarmed criticism of *Psycho* by insisting, with whatever depths of deviousness, that it was meant as a joke; Powell never took that line on *Peeping Tom*, nor did Hitchcock ever belittle the seriousness of *Vertigo*. Both are intensely romantic films, ending in a paroxysm of love and death that leaves the surviving partner (Anna Massey, James Stewart), and the spectator alongside them, shattered, with nothing left to cling on to. And the critical standing of both films has changed dramatically over the years, more so even than that of *Psycho*; both have gone from derided or patronised failure to achieve a secure central place in academic film study and in the critical literature.²⁰

The big difference is that *Vertigo*, unlike *Peeping Tom*, was a reasonable commercial success at the time, and has become much more widely celebrated. With *Psycho*, Hitchcock achieved a new level of celebrity, and remained bankable thereafter; he died very rich. Powell never really

recovered from the failure of *Peeping Tom*, had an uneven career thereafter, and died relatively poor.

Why this divergence? Hitchcock was much shrewder in managing his career, much more careful with money, better at protecting himself, more tactful, a better film industry politician. For all the common factors between them, they were, as suggested already, at opposite extremes in lifestyle and personality. Hitchcock was bulky, sedentary, cautious and celibate, while Powell was lean, active, impetuous and, as his memoirs indicate, far from celibate; Hitchcock hid behind a variety of carefully crafted masks and evidently never contemplated an autobiography, whereas Powell's two-volume work is wonderfully open and vigorous; Hitchcock was notoriously reluctant to acknowledge the contribution of his collaborators, of scriptwriters in particular, but Powell was the polar opposite, insisting on the famous form of shared credit with his screenwriter: 'Written, produced and directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger'. As early as 1927, Hitchcock wrote that 'when moving pictures are really artistic they will be created entirely by one man', and liked ever after to give the impression that he was such a man.²¹ In contrast, almost as if in direct riposte to this, Powell ended his book on the filming of his very personal project *The Edge of the World*, made before he had even met Pressburger, with the reflection that 'no one man ever made a film . . . in the long run it is good team-work that makes a good film'.²²

One can defend Hitchcock by arguing that his calculated self-promotion was beneficial both to his career and to the commercial success of his films, and thus helped others who had a stake in them. I am not suggesting that he was hard and Powell soft; indeed Powell's ability to be rude and ruthless is very well documented. But they adopted different strategies of self-promotion and career management. Most spectacularly, Hitchcock went to Hollywood when he had the chance, and Powell did not; he can even be seen as 'in a sense, the Hitchcock who didn't go to Hollywood'.²³ Had he done so, he might easily have had a bad time, and clashed with studio executives as painfully as, in the event, he did with those of the Rank Organisation; but, equally, he might have prospered, and he would at least have found himself in a less impoverished and discouraging 1950s environment. Very few of his generation managed to sustain a rewarding career in Britain beyond the start of that decade.

So I come back to my title, 'Two directions for British cinema', which is intended to have two meanings. The first and obvious one is that which so definitively separated Powell and Hitchcock: go to Hollywood, or turn back to Britain. Powell made several professional visits to Hollywood, but would never make a film there. That decision, 'Hollywood or Britain?', remains one that ambitious individuals continue to face, even more so than in the past now that travel is easier and national cinematic boundaries less stable. But the other meaning, at least as important, is that of the quotation from Powell that I used earlier: 'Like me, Hitch was

21 Hitchcock in the London daily *The Evening News*, 16 November 1927, quoted in Donald Spoto, *The Life of Alfred Hitchcock: the Dark Side of Genius* (London: Collins, 1983), p. 103.

22 Powell, *The Edge of the World*, p. 327.

23 Barr, *Vertigo*, p. 14

impatient with the men who financed the struggling British film industry, who looked inward instead of outward'. Their shared policy dates from the late 1920s, long before Hitchcock went to Hollywood. Inward or outward? – both of them, in their drive to create viable forms of British cinema, chose the outward direction, at two levels: learning from a wide range of international experiences, influences and collaborators, and also repeatedly dramatizing encounters between British and non-British characters. The aim is not to produce a nebulous kind of international product, but precisely to create a sharper and more dynamic form of British cinema, and in this they succeed, Hitchcock most spectacularly in the series of thrillers of the 1930s, Powell rather later. *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) is widely and affectionately seen as the most 'typically British' of the films of its decade, and at the same time is thoroughly international in its setting, in its range of characters, and in the nature of its challenge to national complacency. Powell and Pressburger's films are almost all centred on characters who cross a border, and on the resulting encounters of lifestyles and values, encounters which can be seen as inspired by, and as symbolizing, the cross-border encounter between the anglophile European screenwriter and the europhile English director.

One of the recurring debates in British cinema has been between the concepts of national and international. Hitchcock's main British producer, Michael Balcon, was early in his career tempted to transcend the dangers of insularity by going direct for the international market, for instance by importing US stars. After experiencing some failures he changed his policy, arguing that 'we shall become international by being national' – being as distinctively and even eccentrically British as possible, and thus creating a distinctive branding.²⁴ That may have worked for a time, notably at Ealing, but it makes sense to rework the terms of this national/international opposition, and to argue, in an apparent paradox, that 'we become national by being international': that the best way of becoming national in the first place is by embracing the international. Historically, it was only when Britain became intelligently open to international influences that it began to find a strong, meaningful national identity for its own production.²⁵ And in demonstrating this, first Hitchcock and then Powell remain two crucial figures.

²⁴ Michael Balcon, *A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), p. 61.

²⁵ For a version of this argument see my essay 'Before *Blackmail*: British silent cinema', in Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 1997).

Autobiography, the self and Pressburger–Powell’s *The Golden Years* project

ANDREW MOOR

Late in 1951, Emeric Pressburger wrote a treatment for *The Golden Years*, a biopic of the German composer Richard Strauss who had died two years earlier. Pressburger had recently collaborated with Michael Powell on *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951), their film of Offenbach’s opera, and had originally hoped to follow up that ‘composed’ film with an adaptation of Strauss’s opera *Der Rosenkavalier*. Instead, by August 1952 a ninety-four-page draft screenplay had been prepared for an ‘autobiography’ of the composer. It is as formally innovative as anything produced by The Archers, and is a sophisticated reworking of themes that are critical to their work.

In his autobiography, Powell refers to ‘Emeric’s plan of a film about Strauss’, admitting that ‘if Emeric would write the script as if the composer were the camera’, his own enthusiasm would derive from the opportunity to experiment with film form and to develop the audiovisual possibilities opened up by *Hoffmann*.¹ Powell embarked on a world tour in March 1952 to seek financial backing for future projects, and at Columbia Pictures the Strauss idea interested Harry Cohn, already an admirer of *Hoffmann*. Powell agreed The Archers would submit a script within four months. He and Pressburger promptly visited Strauss’s family in Germany, and then Powell’s time was occupied in theatre work until the late summer. The main body of the screenplay can therefore be ascribed to Pressburger, but the complex formal conceits it describes respond to Powell’s known skills as a visual artist.

¹ Michael Powell, *Million Dollar Movie* (London: Mandarin, 1993), pp. 202–6.

2 Kevin Macdonald, *Emeric Pressburger: the Life and Death of a Screenwriter* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), p. 341; Powell, *Million Dollar Movie*, pp. 208–16; Ian Christie, *Arrows of Desire: the Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger* (1985) (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), p. 105.

3 Thanks are due to Thelma Schoonmaker for granting me access to Michael Powell's papers, and to Ian Christie for assisting with this.

4 See the dossier on 'Michael Powell's Late Projects', *Film Studies*, no. 2 (Spring 2000), pp. 77–104.

5 Their next unrealized project (1952–3), based on Chaim Weizmann's autobiography, was also set to use the camera as protagonist-subject. More conventional instances of 'biographical' filming followed with *The Battle of the River Plate* (1956) and *Ill Met By Moonlight* (1957), generic war films governed by a realist aesthetic that Powell found irksome.

Cohn rejected the finished script and the film was never made. Kevin Macdonald suggests the script's formal sophistication was to blame, although he also agrees with Powell and Ian Christie that Strauss's reputed association with the Third Reich was problematic.² Pressburger's removal of some historically sensitive sequences from the final screenplay suggests that he too was mindful of this. Strauss's politics had not troubled Cohn earlier in 1952 when he first expressed interest, but significantly he invested no money and neither was he committed to the project.

Brief pre-production notes, an original twenty-nine-page synopsis, a short first script (dated November 1951) and the full, final draft screenplay for 'A film to be written, produced and directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger' now sit in Powell's archives at the British Film Institute.³ None of this material has been published. Powell's own, later, unrealized projects have received some critical attention,⁴ but not *The Golden Years*. Yet, as this essay demonstrates, it is an important and substantial component of Powell and Pressburger's collaborative work. *The Golden Years* forms part of their wider interest in life-writing and particularly in the relationship between fiction and autobiography.⁵ I contend that it translates into filmic terms a feature of the literary autobiography: namely, the very impossibility of its ideal aim to encapsulate the truth about its subject (despite its claim to have done so). Elsewhere in The Archers' films there is an emphasis on the way subjectivity is constructed discursively: this is a key feature of autobiographical writing. I maintain that *The Golden Years* confirms Pressburger's belief that 'the self' is formed in and through texts. It also repeats the pair's earlier films by envisaging a form of selfhood which is relational, developed through interaction with others and signified through social kinships. *The Golden Years*' endorsement of this form of 'intersubjectivity' contrasts with a more isolated, autocratic and demonized type of individual found in Powell and Pressburger's work.

Because of the unfamiliarity of the screenplay, my analysis is prefaced by a descriptive outline, grouped around its salient themes.

Narration and identity

An introductory note in the synopsis explains its mode of narration:

The Life of a great man has never before been told as an autobiography on the screen. In our film, the hero, Richard Strauss, tells his own life-story: his voice, his thoughts, his memories and his imagination fill the screen with images, while gradually another image is forming in our minds of the man we do not see on the screen, except for two brief moments, both rather extraordinary occasions. Who can tell a man's life-story better than the man himself? He is the ideal viewpoint; we see, we hear, we feel, we imagine, everything from his unique point of view; no solid body, no actor's mask comes between us and the image

of the man which is gradually being formed in our imagination just as we form our impressions of ourselves through overhearing scraps of conversation, through observing the faces of our friends and acquaintances, through casual reflections, through old photographs ('Can that really be I?').

The camera, then, will occupy Strauss's place throughout the film. After setting the style, an explanatory note tells the reader that 'the camera's name is Richard', a similar technique to Robert Montgomery's attempt at first-person film noir, *Lady in the Lake* (USA, 1947). Montgomery's bold experiment, with the camera playing the part of Phillip Marlowe, formally develops the detective genre's reliance on looking, but feels like a gimmick. It literalizes the camera's protagonist-function, and can seem hamstrung by its self-imposed limitations, begging the question: would The Archers' attempt have failed for similar reasons? The attention to point of view in *The Golden Years*, though, is more characteristic of The Archers' work – in some senses a logical extension of it – and Powell was confident he could achieve something worthwhile. The synopsis then explains how the absence of a lead actor will be accommodated:

1870: The shadow of an old man leaning on his stick lies across the sunlit pavement. The scene is Munich 1870. Is this old man, who is music aloud, 85 year-old Richard Strauss, who looks back over his long life and great career? Or is the little boy, whose shadow skips out from where it lies hidden in the old man, and goes dancing down the street? The magic of an autobiography is that the narrator is old and young at the same time: he can recreate the scenes of his boyhood so that we see them as vividly and as imaginatively as the child did, and he can also be there himself, as wise, old man, to comment, to explain, to recreate the golden years, to put words into the mouths of shadows.

This shows the project's interest in time and memory; while the questions about identity highlight the way it is motivated by the 'search' for Strauss. His voice will intermittently narrate his story (Marius Goring's name is mentioned as a possible source of the voiceover). At one point, mirroring the 'eyelid shot' in *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), a sequence will fade out as Richard closes his eyes. 'Natural' camera movement (emulating the movement of Strauss's body) and subjective sequences (Strauss's imagination) will anchor the film in and around the disembodied composer. In the closing sequence, a fragment of 'real', silent, home-movie footage (given to Powell and Pressburger by the Strauss family) of Strauss celebrating his eighty-fifth birthday in 1949 will be screened within the film, allowing us, ultimately, to see the protagonist projected within the diegesis. This is the second of the two 'brief moments' referred to in the screenplay's opening note.

Eta: ballet, desire and idealization

Echoing the film audience's desire to see Richard, the composer's life is structured by his longing for Eta (Ludmilla Tcherina, another Archers' stalwart), a young ballet dancer he first sees when he is seventeen at a production of Wagner's *Siegfried* but who evades him throughout his life. Eta is purely fictional, and the synopsis is explicit about her traditional, Romantic purpose: 'She is first love, first inspiration, the Muse, the phantom that every artist pursues, the unattainable ideal, for whom he paints, writes and composes.' She leaves for Paris and they never meet again, yet she recurs through the film: Richard and his fiancée Paulina discuss a photograph of her in 1894; Richard imagines her performing The Dance of the Seven Veils as he composes his opera *Salome* and later pictures her as Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier*. He refuses to see her in 1914 because he cannot face the possibility of her having aged. While Eta waits behind a closed door, he does talk with her daughter (also played by Tcherina), a young dancer with Diaghilev's company in Paris. As Strauss speaks with Eta's daughter, his broken reflection is seen as he notices himself, unclearly, in a distant mirror: the only occasion before the final sequence when we too are allowed a glimpse of Strauss. On his eighty-fifth birthday, Richard sees Eta again, briefly, in the home-movie footage which the Strauss family are watching – presumably a cutaway shot of Tcherina was to be inserted into the archive film of Strauss.

Artistic creation

The screenplay is structured on standard, 'biopic' fare. Its accelerated time shift forward from 1924 to 1949, for example, is marked by a traditional montage sequence of Strauss's operatic successes (*Arabella*, *Die ägyptische Helena*, *Die schweigsame Frau*, *Daphne*) mixed with sounds and images denoting the rise of Nazism, war, and the Russian occupation of Dresden. Four key moments in Strauss's career, though, are singled out for more considered treatment: '*A Hero's Life*: 1895–1905'; *Salome* (1905); *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911), and *Intermezzo* (Strauss's most autobiographical opera, set in 1904 and first performed in 1924).

A Hero's Life: 1895–1905

The shadow of Richard is seen on a roadway, as he reminisces over his early tone-poems, *Don Juan*, *Don Quixote*, *Macbeth*, *Also sprach Zarathustra* and *Till Eulenspiegel*. Then, 'with a bound the shadow-characters take the stage away from their musical creator. . . . It is a Ballet of Shadows. . . . Sometimes mingling with his creations we see the shadow of young Richard Strauss, conducting them.' The real Strauss's quasi-autobiographical symphonic poem *Ein Heldenleben* (*A Hero's Life*) incorporates musical quotations from these earlier compositions, and the music for the film's four-minute ballet will use these quotes

6 Beecham had a close relationship to Strauss's music, and conducted the British premieres of many of his orchestral and operatic works.

(taken from Thomas Beecham's recording of *Ein Heldenleben* with the Royal Philharmonic, and reuniting The Archers with their musical collaborator on *Hoffmann*.⁶ The spectral gallery of balletic literary-musical intertexts merges and vanishes, leaving the isolated figure of Salome.

A brief 'biographical' sequence follows, touching on a marital argument between Richard and Paulina in 1904. Strauss's voiceover decides that one day he will write a comic opera about the incident. The screenplay's dialogue here is taken, word for word, from Strauss's libretto for *Intermezzo* (1924).

Salome

We see the dress rehearsal and final writing of The Dance of the Seven Veils from the opera *Salome*. This extended sequence considers the sense of shortfall between ideally imagined artworks and their inadequate realization. Strauss has doubts about the casting of the soprano Frau Wittich as Salome. Marie Wittich was famously obstinate about the potential indecency of performing the dance in the opera's premiere. Ernst von Schuch, the musical director at Dresden, criticizes Strauss's perfectionism and comments on his impossible dreams: 'You demand a voice like a Valkyrie from the body of a slender, red-haired Jewish Princess of sixteen. . . . You will never, never have the hips!' Strauss frets over Frau Wittich's waistline as he corrects his manuscript, and envisages Eta dancing Salome. This was to have been a nine-minute visual centrepiece to the film, like 'The Red Shoes' ballet, with special effects transforming Strauss's room into Herod's Palace as the imagined music fills his room.

Der Rosenkavalier

This was Strauss's first real, new collaboration with Hugo von Hofmannsthal (the earlier *Elektra* was an adaptation of Hofmannsthal's existing stage play). The librettist's shadow detaches itself from Strauss's before the actor playing him appears on screen: a visual image of intimate partnership. The opera's orchestral overture portrays a sexual encounter between its young hero, Octavian⁷ and an ageing married woman, the Marschallin. The curtain rises just as the overture and the sex are concluding. In *The Golden Years*, Hofmannsthal relates the opening scenario to Strauss. The overture's music is heard, triggering a visualization of the scene itself (with Eta playing Octavian). The scene becomes 'as passionate as good taste and the Production Code allow', and suddenly the action freezes, the overture music stops and coitus is interrupted, while the collaborators consider the Censor's objections. Strauss says he knows 'how to do it . . . with music'. The orchestra recommences and the picture 'unfreezes'. Embroidered curtains then close discretely across the love scene, leaving the music to prompt the audience to visualize the denied spectacle. The curtains are held shut until the point in the overture when they are supposed to open, six bars before the end, tactfully just too late to expose the lovers *in flagrante*.

7 Octavian is a boy's role, sung by a female soprano, echoing Mozart's Cherubino, and anticipating the *travesti* casting of Pamela Brown as Nicklaus in the Archer's *Tales of Hoffmann*.

The camera then pans to the opera score for a discussion about Act II (the ceremonial arrival of Octavian at Faninal's room, dressed as the 'Rosenkavalier'). In the opera, the spectacle of Octavian's arrival is only described on stage; in the film, we see it acted out, up to the moment when the ideal figure of Eta walks through the door to Faninal's room. With a cut on action to the interior, the imagined performance is spliced to the stage of La Scala, and instead of 'the ideal creature we have seen outside', an obese Italian mezzo-soprano enters and the opera continues. Italian Futurists in the audience riot over Strauss's anachronistic, apparently conservative use of 'Viennese' waltz music, but by the end of the opera, they are won over. The entire sequence from the opera's conception, performance and reception will last eighteen minutes.

Intermezzo

The marital dispute in 1904 provided Strauss with the material for his conversational, autobiographical opera, *Intermezzo*. The screenplay has run through some of the argument (about Richard's mistakenly supposed infidelity) once already. In 1914, Strauss tells Hofmannsthal about the argument, initiating a flashback to 1904 and a return to the original scene. Like the earlier treatment, the opera's final libretto provides the dialogue (acted straight, without music). Hofmannsthal suggests Strauss should write the opera himself, and we return again to 1904 for the end of the squabble, as music filters in: 'During Paulina's final speech, the music swells, the lights become richer, the background starts to glow. Paulina herself seems to change and expand, the camera pans round – and we see (or think we see) Richard Strauss for the first time in the story. He looks larger than life. He smiles and takes her in his arms.' Instead of speaking, 'Strauss' sings. They are onstage at Dresden, and the end of the scene is acted out operatically, framed in a proscenium arch. The camera pulls back to reveal Richard's hand holding Paulina's in a box at the theatre, and pans up to reveal Paulina in 1924 (twenty years older than the Paulina on stage). Outside the theatre, a poster reveals this to be *Intermezzo*'s first performance to mark Strauss's sixtieth birthday. The shadow of the older Richard Strauss is seen watching the theatre, reflecting on his happy marriage, before the standard career-montage telescopes forward to 1949.

Death and transfiguration?

The final sequence plays out Strauss's eighty-fifth birthday at his house in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, where he and his family are viewing a 'documentary' film of Strauss at a presentation to receive the freedom of Garmisch (on 11 June 1949). Finally, Strauss is seen, in black-and-white silent footage, framed and contained on a screen within a screen. The Strauss watching the film thinks he sees Eta in the crowd at the Presentation. When the film is screened again, she is not there. As Strauss begins to conduct an orchestra within the silent film, the Munich orchestra, secretly installed on the lawn outside the home, strikes up a

theme from *Der Rosenkavalier*. In a Romantic-sublime crescendo, the camera follows the melody through the countryside to the mountains; it returns to the lawn at Garmisch, back to the shadow of Richard. As the music climaxes, his shadow fades, vanishes, and the film ends.

***The Golden Years*, Powell and Pressburger**

The Golden Years reiterates many of Powell and Pressburger's recurring interests. It foregrounds their fascination with a cluster of ideas to do with auto/biography – self-expression, memory, continuity, 'great men' (especially artists), and the use of 'real people' as guarantors of 'authenticity' (remember Massine, Marie Rambert, Thomas Beecham). There is also a metanarrative and metacinematic awareness of story construction, point of view, voyeurism and spectacle. A note in the screenplay explains why it was planned 'auto'-biographically: it had never been done before; the physical absence of Strauss would shift attention to the impact of his friends and acquaintances on his psychical development; the conflation of narrator with protagonist would provide an 'ideal viewpoint'; and the formation of an imagined sense of the composer would magnify the spectator's identification with him. This shows Pressburger's concern with the dynamics of spectatorship, an interest usually associated with Powell. Another note in the draft treatment states its intention to separate Strauss's bourgeois German life from the 'magic world of the theatre', recapitulating a crucial motif in their work: the depiction of 'alien territories' and liminal experiences.⁸ This is often constructed as a geographical or other cultural shift (*The Red Shoes* [1948], for example, anticipates *The Golden Years* in entering fabulous back- and on-stage spaces). The motif speaks of Pressburger's early, transnational experiences (his exile fictionalized in picaresque narratives), but, I propose, it also signifies the filmmakers' shared interest in matters of form. *The Red Shoes* and *The Tales of Hoffmann* blur the boundaries between 'contained' tales and frame narratives. Texts exceed their margins to impinge on characters and, reversing the trajectory, artists project themselves imaginatively into their texts.

Strauss's artistic imagination is first depicted when characters from his early tone-poems dance their shadow ballet with him. The 'real' Strauss's tone poems are 'illustrative' pieces of programme music asking their audience to visualize their story-worlds. *The Golden Years* presents these images for us by purporting to enter the composer's fantasized imagination, but their silhouetted form underscores the way the visual medium is not fully substituting for the ideal. The dancing shadows herald the project's concern with processes of representation. Scenes from *Der Rosenkavalier* which are off-stage or behind curtains are visualized for us, and an ideal Dance of the Seven Veils is performed, although the screenplay notes Strauss's awareness that it would never be danced so well on the operatic stage. Overweight opera singers are used as comic shorthand for the inadequacies of operatic performance, and

⁸ See Charles Barr, 'In a strange land: the collaboration of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger', *La Lettre de la Maison française d'Oxford*, no. 11 (Trinity-Michaelmas), pp. 95–104; see also Andrew Moor, *Magic Spaces: the Cinema of Powell and Pressburger* (London: IB Tauris, 2004).

more widely for the gap between the material limitations of art and a more idealistic conception. Repeating an important credo which is present in *The Red Shoes* but exemplified in *Hoffmann*, the screenplay implicitly argues that, unlike theatre, film can best unite the arts. Likewise, the 'special effects' in the ballet of 'The Red Shoes' manifestly claims that, although Lermontov's production is magically 'perfect', this level of spectacle is provided through cinema alone.

Cinematic magic, though, is trickery: The complaint that Strauss unreasonably demands a 'voice like a Valkyrie' from a slender teenage Salome paraphrases one of the reviews of *Hoffmann*. Commenting on the way Powell and Pressburger spliced operatic voices to ballet dancers' bodies, Fred Majdalany conjured an alarming image when he wrote that 'the cinema's edge on its competitors is its ability to cheat legally. The screen can, if it chooses, display Betty Grable in a bathing suit singing Wagner with the voice of Kirsten Flagstad while riding the wing of a Flying Fortress.'⁹ With Ludmilla Tcherina as their high-art Betty Grable, Powell and Pressburger plan a similar deception in *The Golden Years*.

⁹ Fred Majdalany, *The Daily Mail*, 19 April 1951.

Life-writing, truth and knowledge

If we should mistrust the post-production trickery anticipated in Pressburger's screenplay, we should, I suggest, also be wary of its claims to encompass and understand its subject. As the home-movie footage of the real Strauss is screened, a note in the treatment asserts: 'Yes, this is Richard Strauss, at the end of his long life – it is also young Richard. See the impish gleam in his eye. . . . Yes, it is Richard Strauss all right. We know him.' The note is optimistic, but ambiguities in the text leave open the possibility of a counter-argument. Strauss's evasive nature throughout the screenplay suggests that neither he nor his history are concrete or within our grasp, and his final manifestation is readable in ways which dispute whether we fully comprehend its subject.

Autobiography is heavily implicated with claims to knowledge. Charting the genre's history, it is possible to construct a narrative which sees a transition from a 'classic' model, which expresses an ideology of confident, bourgeois individualism (the 'Man in Society' account), to a more modernist and contingent form, acclimatized to various poststructural ideas about the fragmentation of the self.¹⁰ A parallel reading would note the democratization of the genre. A welcome and diverse crescendo of feminist, postcolonial and gay/queer voices (along with other marginal and subaltern contributions) have troubled the purportedly hegemonic assumptions of the 'classic' model, while changes in the cultural climate have allowed auto/biography to encroach on private matters more explicitly. Accepting some of the insights of well-rehearsed histories like these, there nevertheless exists no simple binary between naive and sophisticated forms of autobiography, and various understandings of the form's strengths and limitations have long been noted. By 1928, the influence of literary modernism could be heard

¹⁰ See Mary Evans, *Missing Persons: the Impossibility of Auto/Biography* (London: Routledge, 1999).

11 André Maurois, *Aspects of Biography* (1929) (New York, NY: Frederick Ungar, 1966), p. 148.

12 Robert Smith, *Derrida and Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 57.

13 Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film* (London: Routledge, 1989) p. 15.

in André Maurois's Cambridge lecture series on life-writing. Although he still speaks in terms of authenticity and perfection (a sign that he is enthralled by the genre's ideal potential), Maurois admits that life-writing is underscored by the question, 'Is it possible to know the truth about a man [sic]?'¹¹ Autobiography's special claims to knowledge are false, he argues, because the writer forgets, misremembers, censors (consciously or unconsciously), shapes the narrative dramatically according to a sense of form, and imposes a rational teleology on the life recalled to systematize it coherently and make sense of it. Maurois's dissection of life-writing is therefore tinged with the language of psychoanalysis, and admits that the self is not so integrated. Any theory of autobiography must also accommodate a theory of subjectivity: is the self unified or fragmented?; is it self-referentially sovereign or, in Robert Smith's words, 'wrought with political and conceptual barbs'?¹² Althusserian perspectives observe how identity is imposed on the individual; Lacanian and Foucauldian approaches show how the subject is constituted through language and discourse. *The Golden Years* cannot grasp its elusive subject, and this is where its tone of utopian longing (typical of *The Archers*) comes from.

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp (1943) compares usefully with *The Golden Years*: except for a brief frame narrative, it is a self-reflexive, postmodern, fictional auto/biography. Its extended flashback structure is motivated by character revelation, initiated when Clive Candy declares to Spud, 'You laugh at my moustache but you don't know why I grew it! How do you know the sort of man I was – 40 years ago?' Thereafter, *Blimp* holds two modes of time in mind simultaneously: ancient Candy's narrating presence is anchored in 1942, while his younger self advances through four decades, converging on him.

A predictably recurring characteristic of literary autobiography is the presence of a knowing narrator who describes a naive protagonist's path to understanding. It is a first-person *Bildungsroman* form, mapping the hero's or heroine's journey of education, achievement and reconciliation. A battery of flexible linguistic devices mediates between past and present until the protagonist, narrator and author unite as one seemingly coherent subject. As Maureen Turim notes, screened events in film tend to be perceived as if they are in the present, and once a flashback has been initiated its sense of past-ness can be forgotten, although cinematic codes (reflective voiceover, mise-en-scene, and so on) can still try to evoke this sense.¹³ In Candy's flashback, an ironic gap opens up between his blinkered, sentimental point-of-view (of gentlemanly warfare, for example) and our sense of historical reality, provoked by the film's niggling doubts about derelict British behaviour in the Boer War and laid bare in the devastated mise-en-scene which surrounds Candy's blithe chivalry during the World War I sequences. Distancing effects like this, which depart from Candy's subjective memory, remind us that this is an unreliably told tale of past misadventure and qualify the flashback's status as fictional autobiography.

14 Shirley Neumann, 'Autobiography: From different poetics to a poetics of differences', in Marlene Kadar (ed.), *Essays in Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice* (Toronto, ON and London: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 214. See also Evans, *Missing Persons*.

The autobiographical subject is elusive, never quite grasped or emphatically 'here', even though the converging timescales point to an excited moment when the subject finally reaches the present and merges with the author. Its (impossibly idealistic) aim, as Shirley Neumann says, is 'to become fully present: to arrive at a confluence of "I" in the text and the person-narrating/writing'.¹⁴ *Blimp*'s closing frame narrative shows Candy's retrospective narration to have begun a productive process which will later bring him to discard his carapace of outdated Blimpishness and to face contemporary reality. However, this path to self-knowledge is not completed within his remembered first-person narrative, but in the coda, where he is no longer the subject of autobiography, but the object of biography. The film's resolution partly mirrors the expected autobiographical arc – past and present are unified at the moment Candy stops telling his tale – but the narrator, protagonist and subject do not formally coalesce in an image of continuity. Candy no longer has any claim to be the 'person-narrating'. History, the dominant culture of the Peoples' War (into which Candy has now been recruited), takes over this function in the film's closing moments. Stirring march-music, Roger Livesey's affectionate portrayal of Candy, his direct salute to camera in the film's last shot, and the incorporative ideals of wartime ideology all provoke identification with the old man. These powerful sentiments mask the way the text has slipped out of first-person narration and they substitute for the knowledge which autobiography aims to provide.

Multi-layered temporalities also inform each other in *The Golden Years*. The old Strauss's shadow gives birth to the small boy's in the opening sequence. There are poignant intrusions from the old shadow throughout the text, and the treatment of *Intermezzo* patterns a complex timescale set in 1904, 1914, 1924 and 1949. Similarly, the delayed sight of Strauss in his home-movie footage would seem to point to an idealistic resolution, fulfilling Neumann's observation by providing an 'I' in the text to converge with the person narrating. Crucially, however, despite the formal insistence that the person on the contained screen is identical to the narrating presence of the frame narrative's camera, the image of Strauss automatically marks him as an 'other', an object. The treatment refers to the figure as 'him', slipping, as *Blimp* does, into the third person, and demonstrating that the critical problem for autobiography is that it must construct its self as other.

What of the treatment's claim that we come to 'know' Strauss? Written autobiographies often incorporate photographs within their scripted texts, and their status seems to be to confer irrefutability on the project, corroborating what is written with seemingly forensic evidence of the subject's past existence. They point up the genre's referential strengths. The documentary format of the Strauss family home-movie was set to confer a similar legitimacy on the project. The screening of this actuality footage flags up the artifice of the fictional presentation surrounding it: the break in continuity, as home-movie images are seen, undercuts the deceptive illusionism of the frame narrative; the actuality

footage points more strongly to the 'real world', outside. The desire to see any moving image of the composer, and the instilled sense of closure offered by this glimpse, provide further motivations to find in these images an answer to the autobiographical quest for the true Richard.

The sequence's meaning cannot, however, be contained, because the distinction between the 'fiction film' (in colour and sound) and the documentary footage (in black and white, and silent) highlights the project's interest in modes of representation. The metacinematic implication of the rigged-up projector and screen are that *this* Richard, the film's evasive *object* of desire, is just another representation. Richard Strauss has no bodily presence within 'his' diegesis, and the frame of the screen in the Strauss family's villa confines and doubly distances the image of the man from us. The ghostly quality of the film image denies Strauss the possibility of being 'present'. The receding, framed image of Strauss is reminiscent of Xanadu's multiple mirror reflections of Charles in *Citizen Kane* (USA, 1941), another modernist fictional biography of a 'great man' which shows how his totality cannot be encapsulated, and does not provide answers as to whether its hollow 'hero' was more than the sum of his remembered parts.

The actuality footage in *The Golden Years* seems rooted in empiricism, but the form of knowledge it offers is discursive. The project draws on autobiography, the biopic, the backstage musical, the family melodrama, home-movies, and it can also be read as a Powell–Pressburger auteurist piece. In encompassing all these possibilities, it offers a chance to see knowledge of another (here, Richard Strauss) as a discursive practice. This puts under scrutiny the treatment's assertion: 'Yes, we know him', because exactly who the 'him' is, is debatable. The plural discourses at work construct a spectrum of Richards. This confusion is dramatized towards the end of the *Intermezzo* sequence, which plays on doubt about which Strauss we are seeing: the supposed representation of him suddenly breaks into singing, and transpires to be Strauss's own representation of himself within his autobiographical opera. Again, layers of images intervene, and all we have are textual versions of the composer, on film, in the incorporated sections of his operas and music, and in the reenacted, fictionalized reactions of those around him in the diegesis. The recurring presence of Eta, who is entirely fictional, attests to the text's invented character.

It is not only *our* knowledge of Strauss which is formally denied. The narrator (the camera, the voiceover) also fails to achieve any fully confident self-knowledge throughout most of the film. This lack of insight is revealed most on the two 'extraordinary occasions' when Strauss is glimpsed on screen, and each of these incidents also relates to events when Strauss sees, or thinks he sees, Eta. These moments, when we see Strauss looking at himself and constructed, therefore, as an object, are the times when his fallibility is exposed to him: Eta dramatizes the folly of the split within him between reality and fantasy. In 1914, Strauss refuses to see Eta because he cannot contemplate his ideal woman having

aged. While Eta waits behind a closed door, he sees another 'Eta', the daughter of the original, rehearsing her ballet steps. As the treatment relates: 'Suddenly he sees that people are smiling. In the long mirror he sees, in the distance, a greying composer talking to an enchanting young ballerina. Can that be he?' In the final screenplay, the reflection is further distorted by the joining of two mirrors. The glance to the mirror is specifically constructed as one of self-reflection, requiring the 'subject' to observe himself as 'object' and enacting the formal impossibility of autobiography's aim to combine these positions.

The second instance inserts Eta, a fantasy figure, into the actuality footage of Strauss's birthday presentation. The imagined sight of her (seen through Strauss's eyes, of course), comments on the subjective quality of cinematic spectatorship, and undermines the documentary's empirical certainty. No one else within the diegesis sees her. Strauss insists on a second screening of the home-movie, Eta is not there, and he admits to himself (and to us via his voiceover) that he invented her as an ideal. The character traits here are a direct repetition of Candy's in *Blimp* and the twin roles for Tcherina repeat the three for Deborah Kerr in that film. The multiple casting in both cases dramatizes the male protagonist's sentimental attachment to an ideal (and by extension his detachment from reality). Lacking *Blimp*'s utopian, propagandizing mission, Strauss's acceptance of reality is lukewarm and hollow, and it precipitates his death. Yet the film finally resolves itself positively, by taking recourse in conventional, rousing shots of mountain landscapes complemented by Strauss's music from *Der Rosenkavalier*, each drawing on the other's traditional Romantic connotations.

Constructions of the self

The Golden Years makes an important claim about how identity is formed, saying in the treatment that we learn about Strauss in the same way that we 'form our impressions of ourselves through overhearing scraps of conversation, through observing the faces of our friends and acquaintances, through casual reflections, through old photographs ("Can that really be I?")'. It would be too bold to extrapolate from this fragment a Powell–Pressburger theory of identity formation, but it does reiterate a strain of thought from *Blimp* and *The Red Shoes*. Candy's character is shown to be constructed via processes of conscious and unconscious identification with real or fictional models of behaviour – some of them representing ideals of masculinity and heroism, or satirical inversions of those ideals (from Ulysses to the Wizard of Oz, through Clive of India, by way of Sherlock Holmes to John Falstaff and David Low's cartoon of Colonel Blimp). *The Red Shoes*' ballerina Victoria Page identifies with a range of cultural representations, from Apuleius's tale of Cupid and Psyche and possibly The Wizard of Oz (again) to narratives from classical ballet and 'The Red Shoes' itself: myths which offer but also contain sanctioned identificatory possibilities.

The personhood on display here is a discursive effect, a fabricated synthesis of instances, snapshots, and social discourses meshing together to comprise the self. In the case of Victoria, the social forces working through her are incompatible, and this leads to her eventual, fatal, fracture. This intertextual view of the self is most obvious in the simulated autobiography of Strauss, which clearly plays with the spectator's cinematic identification with the look of the camera, and thereafter with the text's recreation of Strauss's world, giving scraps and clues about Richard and his work to feed our curiosity, and to enable us more completely to identify with him. At the same time, it underscores the point that the Richard here is an effect of the text. It shows an awareness of the ways in which notions of the self may be discursively produced, anticipating concerns which have been central to theories of life writing more generally.

In an essay entitled 'Relational selves, relational lives: the story of the story', Paul John Eakin takes a gender-based approach to autobiography, and while he notes the sterility of strictly gendered binaries he broadly accepts feminist critiques of the genre which have connected its purported assertions of existential autonomy to the hegemonic operation of patriarchy. More helpfully, he finds, in life-writing by women, a greater emphasis on human relations, quoting Jessica Benjamin's attention to the 'intersubjective dimension' in psychological development.¹⁵ This dialectical view of human socialization – the sense of intersubjectivity – echoes Robert Smith's point that in every autobiography the 'subject is above all inter-subject, co-subject: "my" history, "my" life, is afforded me by others'. Smith cites Herman Parret's Foucauldian argument: 'The autobiographical subject philosophically does not differ from other kinds of subject, and each one is a "discursive effect", fashioned as the grille through which various discrete institutional discourses radiate their power.'¹⁶

Friendship is a key theme in *Blimp*. It is a private bond which vies with the discourses of national identity crystallized in Candy's socially-formed, public character. Friendship is also the central interpersonal dynamic between the three young pilgrims in *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), and again between Dr Reeves and the young lovers Peter and June in *A Matter of Life and Death*. The nuns of the Order of St Faith in *Black Narcissus* (1947) are selected to journey to the remote outpost at Mopu because of the contribution they are expected to make to their group's identity, and the teamwork which drives the Ballet Lermontov in *The Red Shoes* is another instance of The Archers' belief in interdependence. This collaborative ideal (mirroring The Archers' own work practice) is referenced again in *The Golden Years*' recreation of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in Paris (clearly echoing their spectral presence as the model for Lermontov's company). Although it takes up a minor section of the screenplay, Strauss's relationship with Hofmannsthal is central to his artistic identity. His marriage to Paulina, so much a focus of the work and the theme of *Intermezzo*, is clearly also crucial. These instances of

15 Paul John Eakin, 'Relational selves, relational lives: the story of the story', in G. Thomas Couser and Joseph Fichtelberg (eds), *True Relations: Essays in Autobiography and the Postmodern* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1998), p. 67.

16 Smith, *Derrida and Autobiography*, p. 64.

teamwork can be seen to express that line in British wartime ideology which emphasized group solidarity and cooperation, and which demoted strident individualism. It is radically recontextualized in the case of the nuns and the ballet companies in the postwar films, but the same stress on collective solidarity is there. However, the sustained sense of intersubjectivity in Powell and Pressburger's work exceeds any immediate (or outdated) propaganda imperatives. It marks a more thorough interest in group dynamics, participation, dialogue and belonging.

There is a related fascination with a contrasting character type: powerful, charismatic and seemingly self-motivated people who resist the amicable, sociable trend: the autocrats, magus-figures and outsiders in their texts. The films explore the dramatic tension between these individuals and the collective. Captain Hardt in *The Spy in Black* (1939) initiates the tendency for lone, unattached, or exiled men to wander through the films. Played by Conrad Veidt, Hardt alludes to the demonic or otherwise gothicized types who haunt German expressionist cinema. He drowns alone, in enemy waters. Thomas Colpeper (Eric Portman) in *A Canterbury Tale* is another single man, whose position as an amateur lecturer and status as a J.P. raise him above the commonplace and detach him from communion with his society. His criminal activity as the 'Glue-man' responsible for nocturnal attacks on local girls may well signify nothing more than a perverted inversion of his officially sanctioned role as the community's depersonalized wielder of power. He commits his misguided crimes, after all, in the name of social order: a mission to deter the girls from unregulated sex with the soldiers stationed nearby. It is part of the film's utopian drive that Colpeper is forced to confront the unified trio of young pilgrims who have found him out. He is disarmed by their commonsense approach to men and women mixing, and at the close of the film he takes his place among a symbolic congregation at Canterbury Cathedral. It is a qualified ending: Colpeper is still a single man, but his solitude is at least enveloped by the crowd. Boris Lermontov is a more critical case. Frequently alone, always aloof (as was the actor, Anton Walbrook, during filming), in part he is shadowing Veidt who went before him down this avenue of gothic-vampiric outsiders. He is clearly the mesmeric force behind the achievements of his ballet company but he stands apart from it. He arrives uninvited at his choreographer Grischa Ljubov's birthday party, and awkwardly tries to socialize with his 'family' of artists, but the gesture only underscores his isolation, and anticipates his final catastrophic solitude in his box at the theatre in Monte Carlo. Although the Strauss auto-biopic emphasizes connectivity and relationships, it retains elements of these characters: the composer is a 'great man', the charisma of his 'star-persona' is peddled, and ontologically, the text separates him from those he knew by giving him a mere shadow's presence and by occasionally elevating his voice to a narrating, extradiegetic soundtrack. In Powell's own work, the trend anticipates

Mark Lewis in *Peeping Tom* (1960), Bluebeard in *Bluebeard's Castle* (West Germany, 1964), Bradley Morahan in *Age of Consent* (Australia, 1969) and Prospero in his unfilmed version of *The Tempest* (1969).

Looking for Michael and Emeric

The autobiographical properties of *The Golden Years* are, I contend, related to Pressburger's status as a displaced person with a history of expatriation. The discourse of exile typically registers experiences of dislocation and isolation (noticeable in The Archers' picaresque stories, and their lone, messianic characters). Importantly, though, it is also prone to nostalgia and to countering the trauma of interruption by emphasizing homes and homelands, continuity and permanence, community and clubbishness, romantic and utopian longing. Repeatedly, it is concerned with fragmented selves, and performed identities, reflecting the expatriate's shift from a known culture and renegotiation with a new one.¹⁷ *The Golden Years*, like other Archers' films, has all of these traits. Autobiography is similarly situated, and it productively allows the shock of exile to be worked through because both biography and autobiography tend to impose order. They give form, find causal relationships, and crucially they establish linear continuities and confer a sense of self. To Eakin, autobiography 'affords an opportunity to set the story straight, to speak the unspoken, to repair the ruptures of the past'.¹⁸ This is fictionalized in *Blimp*, where Candy's narrative elides key facts and conveniently telescopes time, but where the act of telling has a healing effect on him.

Pressburger's *The Golden Years* screenplay conveys a desire for continuity and stability. It regards Strauss's home at Garmisch fondly. The co-presence of two shadows of Strauss – one aged six in 1870, the other aged eighty-five in 1949 – is a remarkable demonstration of continuity. The double church towers of Munich's 'Frauenkirche' – pointed out as young Richard's earliest memory and then seen again, undamaged amid the postwar devastation – mean the same things as *A Canterbury Tale*'s cathedral: stoicism, durability, stasis, and the insignificance of material, worldly events in the face of the transcendental. The circular return to the church towers formally echoes this sense of permanence. Most importantly, though, the text's first-person narration marks Pressburger's written performance as Strauss, demonstrating the exile's ability to fashion a new and different identity. Pressburger's insistent claim to 'know' Strauss draws hope from autobiography's determination to produce a totalizing and anchoring subject.

There is a coincidence, then, between elements of the screenplay and Pressburger's biography, and each illuminates the other. There are, though, complicated issues in the relationship between Pressburger and his fictional alter ego, Strauss. Pressburger's love of music (as a young man he played violin in an orchestra) explains the appeal of the subject

17 See Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

18 Eakin, 'Relational selves', p. 73.

19 Michael Kennedy, *Richard Strauss: Man, Musician, Enigma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

20 Macdonald, *Emeric Pressburger*, pp. 344–7.

matter, but the real Strauss's mooted attachment to the Nazi regime would seem problematic. Pressburger's Strauss focuses on his music and his family. Politics are bracketed off, and he (Pressburger/Strauss) expresses a sentimental belief that art is all that matters. Michael Kennedy's recent, perceptive biography of the composer finds a Strauss who is identified with a brand of German cultural nationalism which was compromising to the German State.¹⁹ In the 1950s, though, Strauss's reputation was still clouded by his connection to the Reich. Pressburger's early draft, from November 1951, does include material relating to German politics under Hitler. Strauss's working relationship with the Jewish librettist Stefan Zweig is there (including his efforts to protect Zweig's career), anti-Semitism is aired, and Zweig's decision to flee Germany is briefly dramatized. Strauss later comments on the postwar 'Denazification Court' which is considering his case, and which would clear him of guilt. Little of the treatment of this period survives into the final screenplay dated August 1952.

This suspicion of censorship (one of auto/biography's characteristics, as Maurois observed) complicates our reading. Likewise, personal matters in Pressburger's life are translated but radically transformed in the text. The most salient event in Pressburger's own life during the first half of 1952, according to his biographer, was his devastation at the breakup of his relationship with his wife.²⁰ Conversely, much of his screenplay centres sentimentally on Strauss's happily married life with Paulina, and on *Intermezzo*, Strauss's autobiographical translation into opera of his successful marriage. In many ways it is an unusual choice of opera. Despite critical success, it was not performed professionally in Britain until 1974. Strauss's later opera, *Capriccio* (1942), seems more obviously pertinent to *The Archers*, with its discussion of the relative importance of words and music, its call for unifying the arts, and its metatheatrical dimension. *Intermezzo* anticipates *The Golden Years*' interest in translating life events into art (the *prima facie* case for incorporating it), but the screenplay's repeated returns to the events in Strauss's life which provided the basis for the opera, followed by its treatment of the opera itself (with a performance watched by Richard and Paulina, holding hands) suggests an attempt on behalf of the writer compulsively to work through and ameliorate a personal trauma. His motivations, though, are unrecorded. He may have removed the politically sensitive material to enhance the chances of the film's production, but it may signify a wish to evade the political, or a need to self-censor it. His reason for treating the Strauss marriage so sentimentally is similarly unspoken. The generalities of exilic experience can be located in the text, but the critical challenge to outline Pressburger's specific textual presence is impeded.

Although his involvement with the project was minimal, Powell's autobiography suggests that he easily recognized himself in the screenplay. Aside from the transformations and musical treatment of the *Salome* and *Rosenkavalier* sequences, his chief interest was in Strauss's

²¹ Powell, *Million Dollar Movie*, pp. 206–8.

²² Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies* (London: Heinemann, 1986).

²³ Powell, *Million Dollar Movie*, p. 204

collaboration with Hofmannsthal (a name he jokingly gives to Pressburger), confirming both his own identification with Strauss, and that the *film à clef* element of disguised biography appealed to him.²¹

Powell's interest in the fictionalization of himself also informs the provenance of the published memoirs. In 1970 he was working on a quasi-autobiographical third-person novel, *I'm an Eye* (the title's pun flags his interest in point of view). He decided to write in the first person, and hoped to publish it in an illustrated edition with an appendix of a hundred stills and sketches. This intertextual compendium evolved into *A Life in Movies*,²² generically an autobiography but defying some of the genre's typical motifs: the robust, energetic prose style clearly reinvents, verbatim, precise conversations exchanged decades earlier, self-consciously asking readers to regard the storytelling and drama over the facts. This work's novelistic origins survive into the creative narrative voice in the final text. Its title's ambiguity mirrors themes which are repeated in his and Pressburger's films and which drive *The Golden Years*: the inscription of artists' lives in their work and the impossibility of dividing the two. In volume two, *Million Dollar Movie*, he pauses to question what type of book he is writing: 'My publishers call it an autobiography. I call it a hitherto unrecorded piece of social history – no more than that. The critics call it . . . they don't know what to call it. Proust would call it a novel, Chateaubriand a memoir, Rousseau a confession, Voltaire a joke.'²³ By running together these different genres, the text's possible meanings multiply. Each genre produces a different subject, just as *The Golden Years*' incorporation of different discourses creates plural versions of Strauss. Powell's publishers may be happy to market his memoirs as autobiography, but Powell is dissatisfied with the category. His conflation of his life story with social history betrays the parallel he wants to make between himself and the 'movies': it signifies his own acceptance that the subject of his text is constituted by others and by the social-cultural discourses expressing themselves through him. As *The Golden Years* demonstrates, his discursive appreciation of personality marries that of Pressburger, suggesting a sustained interest by the pair in the problems of writing lives.

'The true business of the British movie'? *A Matter of Life and Death* and British film culture

JAMES CHAPMAN

- 1 See the press clippings on the microfiche for the film held by the National Library of the British Film Institute, which does not, however, routinely include page numbers. 'A landmark in films', *Daily Herald*, 2 November 1946; 'Charm of new film fantasy', *Daily Telegraph*, 2 November 1946; 'Royal Command film performance', *The Times*, 2 November 1946; 'Film worthy of royal show', *Sunday Dispatch*, 3 November 1946; 'First Royal Command film', *Reynolds News*, 3 November 1946; 'Film the King saw', *People*, 3 November 1946.
- 2 *A Matter of Life and Death: the Book of the Film*, adapted by Eric Warman, was published in 1946 by World Film Publications of London and sold for seven shillings and sixpence.
- 3 The most sustained critical commentary on the film is Ian Christie's BFI Film Classic, *A Matter of Life and Death* (London: British Film Institute, 2000). See also Ian Christie, *Arrows of Desire: the Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger* (London:

This essay explores the place of *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) in British cinema history and film culture. It is not a study of the film's critical reception as such, though it draws upon various sources, including contemporary reviews, which express a range of opinions about the film. It is, rather, an examination of the various discourses – aesthetic, cultural, political – that circulated around the film upon the occasion of its initial release in Britain. That *A Matter of Life and Death* was deemed an important production for the British film industry is evident from the amount of press attention it attracted.¹ Its special status in British film culture was affirmed by its selection for the first Royal Command Film Performance (at the Empire, Leicester Square, on Friday 1 November 1946 in the presence of King George VI, Queen Elizabeth and the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret) and by the publication of a 'tie-in' novelization of the film.² The critical and popular reaction to the film itself, however, was equivocal – a mixture of admiration for its technical virtuosity and confusion about its narrative. For many years *A Matter of Life and Death* remained a little-seen curiosity until, along with the rest of the Michael Powell–Emeric Pressburger *oeuvre*, it was subject to a critical 'rediscovery' and 'reclamation' by a new generation of critics who sought to rehabilitate Powell following the opprobrium and hysteria that had greeted *Peeping Tom*.³ So thoroughgoing has this reclamation been that the

- Faber & Faber, 1994), pp. 55–9; Raymond Durnat, *A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), pp. 29–30; John Ellis, 'Watching death at work: an analysis of *A Matter of Life and Death*', in Ian Christie (ed.), *Powell, Pressburger and Others* (London: British Film Institute, 1978), pp. 79–104; Sue Harper, *Picturing the Past: the Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), pp. 107–8; Marcia Landy, *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930–1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 154–6; Tony Williams, *Structures of Desire: British Cinema, 1939–1955* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 125–30.
- 4 See, for example, Anwar Brett, 'Call sheet: *A Matter of Life and Death*', *Film Review*, no. 594 (June 2000), pp. 93–7; Ian Christie, 'Out of this world', *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 5 July 1996; Robert Horton, '*A Matter of Life and Death*', *Film Comment*, vol. 26, no. 3 (1990), pp. 36–7; and Patricia King Hanson, '*A Matter of Life and Death*', in Tom Pendergast and Sara Pendergast (eds), *International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers*, Volume 1 (Detroit, IL: St James Press, 2000), pp. 754–7.
- 5 On the organization and policy of the MOI Films Division, see James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda, 1939–1945* (London: IB Tauris, 1998).
- 6 'Feature films – MOI policy, 1943', minutes of the British Film Producers' Association, 23 March 1943.
- 7 Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies* (London: Heinemann, 1986), p. 383.
- 8 Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It: the British Cinema in the Second World War* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 37.

film's 'classic' status is now widely acknowledged both inside and outside the academy.⁴

As with any film, it is impossible to understand the cultural significance of *A Matter of Life and Death* without situating it in its historical context. *AMOLAD* (the familiar abbreviated title by which I shall hereafter refer to the film) can be placed at the nexus of a complex matrix of culture and commerce in the British cinema of the 1940s. Its production combines two, largely separate, histories: the role of the Ministry of Information (MOI) in the promotion of an officially-endorsed wartime film culture, and the parallel emergence of the Rank Organisation as the hegemonic producer–distributor–exhibitor during the war years. The MOI was responsible for the formulation of official film propaganda policy, involving both the direct production of shorts and documentaries and the indirect production of feature films for which it liaised with the commercial sector of the industry through bodies such as the British Film Producers' Association and the MOI's own Ideas Committee.⁵ These were the channels through which the MOI Films Division kept filmmakers aware of official policy directives and co-operated in such matters as the release of film personnel from the services and the provision of facilities for films which had official approval. The sort of film that the MOI preferred is evident from a policy document of 1943 in which it declared that what it wanted were 'first-class war subjects realistically treated; realistic films of everyday life; high quality entertainment films', but that it discouraged 'war subjects exploited for cheap sensationalism; the morbid and the maudlin; entertainment stories which are stereotyped or hackneyed and unlikely because of their theme or general character to reflect well upon this country at home and abroad'.⁶ Following some initial teething troubles in the first year of the war, when it was often accused of failing to provide direction, the MOI thereafter established good working relations with filmmakers to the extent that Powell, in his autobiography, was moved to write that the 'Ministry of Information was a great success, and its Films Division was one of its triumphs'.⁷

The relationship of Powell and Pressburger to the MOI was an especially privileged one. Their *49th Parallel* (1941) was unique in being the only feature film during the war for which the MOI provided direct finance, putting up approximately half of the £120,000 budget, with the balance forthcoming from J. Arthur Rank's General Film Distributors. *49th Parallel*, which used a fictional story of a German U-boat crew on the run in Canada in an attempt to bring home the proximity of the war to the then-neutral USA, had been 'nothing if not a thoroughly schematic and heavily programmed attempt to fulfil all the criteria of excellence for film propaganda laid down by the Films Division of the MOI'.⁸ Powell and Pressburger also made one short for the MOI's five-minute film programme (*An Airman's Letter to His Mother*, 1941) and a feature-length recruiting film for the Admiralty (*The Volunteer*, 1943). The much-publicized controversy over *The Life and Death of Colonel*

9 On the *Blimp* controversy see David Badder, 'Powell and Pressburger: the war years', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 48, no. 1 (1978–79), pp. 8–12; James Chapman, 'The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp (1943) reconsidered', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1995), pp. 19–54; Ian Christie (ed.), *Powell & Pressburger: The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), pp. vii–xx.

10 Powell, *A Life in Movies*, p. 383.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 456.

12 See Nicholas John Cull, *Selling War: the British Propaganda Campaign Against American 'Neutrality' in World War II* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995); Susan A. Brewer, *To Win the Peace: British Propaganda in the United States during World War II* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); H. Mark Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain: the Hollywood 'British' Film, 1939–1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

13 Powell, *A Life in Movies*, pp. 456–60. See also Kevin Macdonald, *Emeric Pressburger: the Life and Death of A Screenwriter* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), pp. 250–58.

14 See, in particular, Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State: the Film Industry and the British Government 1927–84* (London: British Film Institute, 1985), pp. 139–49; Rachael Low, *The History of the British Film 1929–1939: Film Making in 1930s Britain* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985), pp. 208–18; Geoffrey Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 17–50.

Blimp (1943), which became notorious as the film that Winston Churchill wanted to ban, was a temporary setback in the relationship between the duo and officialdom.⁹ However, this was an isolated incident that did no lasting harm to Powell and Pressburger's standing with the MOI. Indeed, Powell described Jack Beddington, Director of the MOI Films Division, as 'one of the most unjustly forgotten men of the war. . . . He was diplomatic, evasive and cunning – just the man for the job. We got on famously throughout the war.'¹⁰

It was Beddington who, in Powell's own account of the origin of *AMOLAD*, asked him and Pressburger to undertake 'a big film' on the subject of Anglo-US relations.¹¹ The perceived 'special relationship' between Britain and the USA had been a major preoccupation of British (and, for that matter, US) propagandists even before the USA's entry into the war in December 1941.¹² The Anglo-US alliance had mixed strategic and political consequences for Britain: on the one hand, the vast economic and industrial muscle of the USA would tilt the war effort decisively in the favour of the Allies, on the other it signalled the eclipse of British power in favour of a new *Pax Americana*. In Britain, cultural anxieties about the influx of US servicemen from 1942 onwards found expression in the phrase 'overpaid, over-sexed and over here'. It became a matter of urgent necessity for British propagandists to project a friendly image of 'Yanks' for public consumption, whilst at the same time reassuring the Americans that Britain was not the stuffy, conservative society that was often imagined. Thus *AMOLAD* belongs in part to a cycle of films meant to bridge the cultural differences between the British and Americans, such as Powell and Pressburger's *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), *The Way to the Stars* (Anthony Asquith, 1945) and *I Live in Grosvenor Square* (Herbert Wilcox, 1945). Powell and Pressburger mapped out a story during the summer of 1944 but production was delayed for a year due to the difficulty of obtaining Technicolor film stock.¹³ In the interim the duo made *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945). *AMOLAD* therefore did not begin shooting until 14 August 1945, coincidentally the day on which Japan surrendered.

That the production history of *AMOLAD* spanned the last year of the war and the first year of the peace is essential to a full understanding of the cultural and political reaction it provoked. So, too, is the fact that, like all Powell and Pressburger films from *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* to *The Red Shoes* (1948), it was backed by the Rank Organisation. This is the second historical context in which *AMOLAD* can be placed, overlapping with, but remaining largely distinct from, the first. The rise of J. Arthur Rank from miller to movie mogul has been well documented and need not be recounted here.¹⁴ The Rank Organisation, which by the end of 1941 controlled two of the main film studios (Denham and Pinewood), the largest distributor (General Film Distributors) and two of the major cinema circuits (Gaumont and Odeon), was the dominant force in the British film industry from the war until the late 1950s. In a bid to establish both industrial and cultural hegemony, Rank in the mid 1940s

was prepared to invest heavily in expensive films that would bring both economic and cultural prestige to the organization. The Archers, as Powell and Pressburger styled themselves, were among the founding members of Independent Producers, a Rank subsidiary established in 1942 in order to provide finance and studio facilities for those filmmakers who wished to make 'prestige' pictures. David Lean, who, along with Anthony Havelock-Allan and Ronald Neame was a partner in Cineguild, another member of Independent Producers, testified to the commercial and creative conditions they enjoyed under Rank's benevolent patronage:

J. Arthur Rank is often spoken of as an all-embracing monopolist who must be watched lest he crush the creative talents of the British film industry. Let the facts speak for themselves, and I doubt if any group of film-makers in the world can claim as much freedom. We of Independent Producers can make any subject we wish, with as much money as we think that subject should have spent on it. We can cast whatever actors we choose, and we have no interference at all in the way the films are made.¹⁵

¹⁵ David Lean, 'Brief Encounter', *Penguin Film Review*, vol. 4 (October 1947), pp. 34–5.

¹⁶ Powell, *A Life in Movies*, p. 418.

Powell also testified that Rank 'didn't want to interfere with our independence'.¹⁶ These conditions would not last, and the group disintegrated later in the decade when retrenchment and production economies took their toll, but for a period of three or four years in the mid 1940s Independent Producers was responsible for such landmark British films as *Caesar and Cleopatra* (Gabriel Pascal, 1945), *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945), *The Rake's Progress* (Sidney Gilliat, 1945), *Great Expectations* (David Lean, 1946) and *Oliver Twist* (David Lean, 1948).

These films – along with other Rank-sponsored productions such as *Henry V* (Laurence Olivier, 1944) and *Hamlet* (Laurence Olivier, 1948) – were central to Rank's strategic aim of establishing its presence in the world film market at the end of the war. Rank's 'prestige' films were intended to match the production values and technical qualities of the best US films whilst maintaining a distinctively 'national' character. It had often been claimed – not without some justification – that British films were technically inferior to their US counterparts. The 'slickness' of the US film was in large measure the result of the institutionalization of the studio mode of production and of the classical style of filmmaking which reached its zenith during the 1930s and 1940s. British films, with rare exceptions such as the polished thrillers of Alfred Hitchcock and the imperial adventure epics of Alexander Korda, were considered pale imitations of the superior Hollywood product. This changed during the war, when the consensus amongst critics was that while British film production had declined in quantity it had improved in quality. 'Everyone recognises now that there has been an extraordinary renaissance in British feature-film production since about 1940', Roger Manvell wrote in 1946, while even the usually jaundiced Richard Griffith conceded that the 'war years and after have seen the British studios produce some really brilliant technicians, among them

- 17 Roger Manvell, *Film* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1946), p. 133; Richard Griffith, 'The film since then', in Paul Rotha with Richard Griffith, *The Film Till Now* (London: Spring Books, 1967), p. 554.
- 18 John Ellis, 'The quality film adventure: British critics and the cinema 1942–1948', in Andrew Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 66–93. This is a substantially revised version of Ellis's seminal article 'Art, culture, quality: terms for a cinema in the forties and seventies', *Screen*, vol. 19, no. 3 (1978), pp. 9–49.
- 19 The critics whose work Ellis analyzes include Campbell Dixon (*Daily Telegraph*), C.A. Lejeune (*Observer*), Jympson Harman (*Evening News*), Fred Majdalany (*Daily Mail*), Dilys Powell (*Sunday Times*), William Whitebait (*New Statesman*) and Richard Winnington (*News Chronicle*). The film reviews of *The Times* and *Manchester Guardian* did not include a byline. Evidence that there was interest in the work of film critics is the publication in the late 1940s of collections of reviews by certain critics, such as C.A. Lejeune, *Chestnuts in Her Lap 1936–1946* (London: Phoenix Press, 1947) and Richard Winnington, *Drawn and Quartered: a Selection of Weekly Film Reviews and Drawings* (London: Saturn Press, 1949).
- 20 See Charles Barr, *Ealing Studios* (London and Newton Abbot: Cameron & Tayleur/David & Charles, 1977); Sue Aspinall and Robert Murphy, *Gainsborough Melodrama: BFI Dossier No. 18* (London: British Film Institute, 1983); Julian Petley, 'The lost continent', in Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1986), pp. 98–119; Robert Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1939–48* (London: Routledge, 1989).
- 21 *News Chronicle*, 22 November 1946.
- 22 The phrase appears to have been coined by John Shearman, 'Wartime wedding', *Documentary*

David Lean and Carol Reed'.¹⁷ It was this renaissance in British filmmaking that gave rise to what John Ellis has since termed the 'quality film adventure' of the mid 1940s.¹⁸

The discourse of 'quality', as Ellis demonstrates, represented 'a highly coherent set of aesthetic judgements' shared by most of the 'middle-brow' film critics writing for national and weekly newspapers and for specialist film journals such as *Sight and Sound*, *Monthly Film Bulletin* (both published since 1933 by the British Film Institute) and *Penguin Film Review* (1946–49).¹⁹ It was a discourse that privileged qualities of 'taste', 'emotional truth', 'restraint', 'realism' and 'authenticity' (terms all vaguely defined) and disliked melodrama or sensationalism. A critical consensus emerged that preferred films characterized by sober and unsensational narratives and true-to-life situations and characters. This discourse in turn did much to establish the canon of 'respectable' British cinema in which, for example, the films of Ealing Studios and the wartime narrative-documentaries of the Crown Film Unit were held up as the foremost examples of this trend. Films that did not exhibit the desired qualities, such as the sensational and visually flamboyant Gainsborough costume melodramas, were regarded as beyond the pale of respectable cinema and were greeted with derision or apathy. There is a clear congruence, furthermore, between the views of the critics and official film propaganda policy in the MOI's expressed preference for 'realistic films of everyday life' and its hostility towards 'cheap sensationalism'. It was not until the 1980s that the paradigms of Ealing/realism and Gainsborough/melodrama were seriously questioned and that the work of reclaiming once-despised genres such as the costume film began in earnest.²⁰

The critical hostility towards the work of Powell and Pressburger has generally been blamed on the prevalence of the realist discourse in contemporary film criticism. That Powell and Pressburger did not 'fit' into the accepted criteria of 'good' cinema is best exemplified in the oft-quoted review of *AMOLAD* by Richard Winnington of the *News Chronicle*, in which he remarked that 'it is even farther away from the essential realism and the true business of the British movie than their two recent films "I Know Where I'm Going" and "Canterbury Tale"'.²¹ This remark is revealing not merely as a statement of Winnington's own aesthetic preferences (which were broadly representative of his fellow critics) but also as an indication that Powell and Pressburger's departure from the 'essential realism' of the British movie was a gradual shift rather than a sudden disjuncture. In fact the duo's earlier wartime propaganda films, *49th Parallel* and *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (1942), had been well received by the critics as exemplars of what came to be called the 'wartime wedding' between the fictional feature film narrative and the style and technique of the documentary film.²² It was *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* – coincidentally their first film made under the patronage of the Rank Organisation – that signalled Powell and Pressburger's willingness to test not only the limits of official

23 Christie, *A Matter of Life and Death*, p. 59.

24 *Today's Cinema*,
5 November 1946, p. 3

25 *Kinematograph Weekly*,
7 November 1946, pp. 22 ff.

26 *Spectator*, 8 November 1946.

27 *People*, 3 November 1946.

propaganda policy but also the aesthetic criteria of 'quality' British cinema: its overt romanticism and bold use of a flashback narrative structure were somewhat at odds with the MOI's preference for 'first-class war subjects realistically treated', reflected in the mixed critical reception of the film. *A Canterbury Tale* and *I Know Where I'm Going!* proved even more problematic for the critics, who were uncomfortable with the narrative ambiguity and mysticism of the films. *AMOLAD*, which problematized conventional notions of diegetic reality through its representation of two different worlds (a realistic Technicolor Earth and a stylized, monochrome 'Other World'), was to prove even more perplexing.

Christie, reacting partly against 'the long-standing native critical hostility towards Powell and Pressburger', asserts that contemporary responses to *AMOLAD* 'were generally positive, with only a minority of outright opponents'.²³ This is, to say the least, a contestable claim. A close analysis of reviews from both the national and the trade press reveals that the critical reception was divided: the film was admired for its technical qualities but criticized for its ambiguous narrative and for its stylistic infelicities. What the reviews demonstrate is a range of responses to the film and to its status as a technical achievement, as a cultural commodity and as a social text. The various discourses circulating around the film demonstrate that there was more at stake for contemporaries than just the realistic aesthetic.

On one level, for example, *AMOLAD* was greeted with extravagant praise as a major production achievement for the British film industry. This was most apparent in the response of the film industry trade papers. *Today's Cinema*, for example, considered it 'the most brilliant technical achievement of any British studio to date', declaring, furthermore, that it was 'a yardstick by which future British triumphs may well be measured'.²⁴ *Kinematograph Weekly* called it an 'outstanding British picture' and drew particular attention to its technical qualities such as the 'magnificent photography' and 'masterly and imaginative direction'.²⁵ Several of the national critics admired the film as a technical achievement above all else, with Alexander Shaw of the *Spectator*, for example, describing it as 'an absorbing cinematic *tour de force* and a great credit to all the technicians who were concerned in its making'.²⁶ S. Rossiter Shepherd, demonstrating that this view was not confined to the middle-brow papers, described it in the *People* as a 'brilliant and stimulating contribution to the high order of British film production'.²⁷ The hyperbole ('brilliant', 'outstanding', 'magnificent'), not just in the trade press where this would be expected but also in the reviews of the national critics, indicates the degree to which *AMOLAD* was recognized as standing out from the norm of British film production. At the same time, however, the emphasis on the film as a technical achievement – understandable in a film industry so often regarded as being technically impoverished in comparison to Hollywood – tended to be at the expense of a more sustained engagement with aspects of form and style.

28 *Daily Herald*, 2 November 1946.

29 *Sunday Express*,
3 November 1946.

30 Rotha, *The Film Till Now*, p. 52.

31 *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 13,
no. 155 (1946), p. 148.

32 *Motion Picture Herald*,
16 November 1946, p. 3310.

33 Ellis, 'The quality film adventure',
p. 69.

34 *Manchester Guardian*,
2 November 1946.

A few of the national critics saw beyond the technical gloss and regarded *AMOLAD* as a major work of film art. The *Daily Herald* critic P.L. Mannock claimed it as 'one of the most astonishing pictures yet made in any country, and intellectually a landmark in screen art'.²⁸ The sort of aesthetic criteria that were being employed is suggested by the comment of Stephen Watts in the *Sunday Express* that 'if the film had been made in, say, Germany in the '20s it would now be on show at esoteric gatherings as one of the classics of Cinema'.²⁹ The German film of the 1920s – or, rather, that small number of German films of the 1920s which exhibited 'expressionist' characteristics – had long been admired by intellectual cineastes as representing, in Rotha's words, 'the real uses of the film medium'.³⁰ Yet there is also a tension here in so far as the film's artistic qualities were seen to place it on the margins of an intellectual film culture alongside avant-garde European films. The likelihood that *AMOLAD* would appeal to intellectual cineastes rather than to a mass audience was explicit in a number of the reviews. The *Monthly Film Bulletin*, for example, thought it 'a brilliant experiment which will probably be enjoyed by many and appreciated only by a few'.³¹ And the US trade paper *Motion Picture Herald* remarked that 'it's one of those films in which Britain lately has specialized which will attract the discriminating who never normally frequent the motion picture'.³² To this extent, *AMOLAD* sits uncomfortably in the discourse of 'quality', in so far as critics saw this as being distinct from traditional notions of 'art cinema' and as something that was not incompatible with popular appeal.³³

That *AMOLAD* was received in terms that emphasized its difference from most other products of commercial cinema is evident in the frequency with which the words 'original' and 'imaginative' featured in the reviews. Most commentators were quick to attribute this originality and imagination to Powell and Pressburger, recognizing their desire to explore the boundaries of film style and aesthetics. The critic of the *Manchester Guardian*, for example, wrote that 'their films have, so to say, a habit of bursting out of the confines of the ordinary commercial cinema. They have wit and taste as well as courage'.³⁴ Yet their work was also something of an acquired taste. One critic, while recognizing that Powell and Pressburger 'have a reputation for eschewing the conventional approach to cinema', nevertheless averred that 'they cannot be assessed as anything more than rather mediocre curiosities'. That critic, Humphrey Swingle, then offered a revealing comparison between Powell and Pressburger and their British contemporaries:

But there is no virtue in being 'out of step' and it is time that the Powell- Pressburger combination achieved something more than mere oddity; time for them, perhaps, to stop reaching for the moon and, if they can, to come down and plant their four feet on the earth with the contemporary technicians. For they would be in no mean company. [Anthony] Asquith, Carol Reed, Launder and Gilliat, the Boultings,

Thorold Dickinson and David Lean among others, are establishing a tradition of solid native skill to which the latest production of this better known combination contributes almost nothing.³⁵

It is significant that all the other filmmakers whom Swingler mentions conformed for the most part to the prevalent realist aesthetic: Asquith (*We Dive at Dawn* [1943], and *The Way to the Stars*), Dickinson (*The Next of Kin* [1942]), Launder and Gilliat (*Millions Like Us* [1943]), John Boulting (*Journey Together* [1945]) and Reed (*The Way Ahead* [1944]) had all made films that can be placed squarely in the 'wartime wedding' of fiction and documentary.

In contrast to the British realist films, the fantasy of *AMOLAD* seemed inappropriate for many commentators, who lamented its lack of seriousness or social relevance. Swingler described the story as 'silly'. Dilys Powell, the long-serving film critic of the *Sunday Times*, felt it was a 'trivial story', concluding her lengthy and considered review with the statement that '*A Matter of Life and Death* remains an audacious, sometimes beautiful, but basically sensational film about nothing'.³⁶

William Whitebait, pseudonymous film critic of the *New Statesman*, similarly derided its 'fatuous plot' and drew attention to 'all the obstacles to dramatic excitement put in our way: Hollywood story, tinsel characters, the usual airport heaven, [and] alternations of whimsy and facetiousness'.³⁷ This response was summed up by Frederic Mullally of the *Tribune*, who, while admiring the film's 'descriptive visual power', found it 'spectacularly unsatisfying' as a narrative. The reason for this, he averred, 'lies in the complete absence of one factor vital to the cinema: the dramatic link with real-life people and their problems'.³⁸

This was the crux of many critics' dissatisfaction with *AMOLAD*: that for all its visual imagination and technical proficiency, its content was trivial, shallow and insignificant. It was, in other words, the antithesis of the 'quality film' as the term was understood within the contemporary critical discourse. It is significant that one of the criticisms levelled against *AMOLAD* was on account of its 'Hollywood story' – the implication being clearly that a British film should feature a plausible story. It was not that critics were hostile to fantasy, though there is certainly evidence of an unease about finding the appropriate evaluative criteria for fantasy films. What seemed more bothersome was their assumption, as Mullally put it, that 'fantasy is barren and meretricious unless used to convey a serious message'. This would tend to explain why *AMOLAD* was less well received than other British films which had used non-realist techniques and imaginary sequences such as *Thunder Rock* (Roy Boulting, 1942), *The Halfway House* (Basil Dearden, 1943) and *They Came To A City* (Basil Dearden, 1944). In those cases, however, fantasy was an allegorical device for examining serious moral and social issues: intellectual isolationism (*Thunder Rock*), war-weariness (*The Halfway House*) and the commitment to a postwar Welfare State (*They Came To A City*).

39 Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939–1945* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), p. 481.

40 *Kinematograph Weekly*, 21 December 1944, p. 4.

41 Mass-Observation File Report 2190E, 'Spiritual trend in films', 4 December 1944, p. 2.

It seems unusual, however, given the recent experience of war, that critics should have regarded the content of *AMOLAD* as trivial. There is evidence that the war threw philosophical questions of life after death into sharper relief, for, while social dislocation disrupted the habit of churchgoing, there was 'a much livelier and more widespread response to religious broadcasting'.³⁹ As ever, popular films responded to, and were informed by, wider social and cultural factors. The increase in the number of practising Roman Catholics during the war, for example, helps to explain the popularity of religious films such as *The Song of Bernadette* (Henry King, USA, 1943) and *Going My Way* (Leo McCarey, USA, 1944) that were both among the top box-office attractions of 1944 in Britain.⁴⁰ With its fantastic narrative offering images of an 'Other World' (albeit with a caption informing us that it 'exists only in the mind of a young airman whose life and imagination have been violently shaped by war'), *AMOLAD* can be seen as one of a cycle of films dealing with the afterlife, both British and American, made during and immediately after the war. This cycle includes, but is not limited to, *Here Comes Mr Jordan* (Alexander Hall, USA, 1941), *A Guy Named Joe* (Victor Fleming, USA, 1944), *Blithe Spirit* (David Lean, 1945) and *It's A Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, USA, 1946). The narrative of *AMOLAD* is closest to *Here Comes Mr Jordan*, reversing its basic idea: in *Here Comes Mr Jordan* the protagonist dies accidentally due to a mistake and has to return to earth in another body when his own is cremated, whereas in *AMOLAD* Peter Carter (David Niven), who should have died when he leapt from his burning Lancaster bomber without a parachute, survives due to a mistake by the conductor sent to escort him to the Other World. Its airman protagonist also bears affinities to that of *A Guy Named Joe* and is a reminder that bomber crews suffered some of the highest casualty rates of Allied servicemen during the war. The trend for films dealing with the afterlife was noted by Len England, chief film researcher of the social survey organization Mass-Observation, in 1944:

It is difficult to suggest a reason for this beyond the obvious one that the war with its death-impact on everybody has made the next world very much more real to everybody. . . . But there is every sign that such films are now doing very well and may start a further boom in this sort of thing.⁴¹

There is no clear evidence of the popular reaction to the film, though it seems reasonable to assume that cinemagoers in Britain in 1946 would have grasped the significance of the date on which the narrative begins (2 May 1945 was less than a week before VE Day) and would have responded to the poignancy of the situation (here is a young man about to die in the last days of the war). To the families of the 55,000 men of Bomber Command killed during World War II, at least, there was nothing trivial about the fate of Peter Carter.

AMOLAD is perhaps best described as a spiritualist rather than a Christian narrative. Christie points out that the film's imagery,

42 Christie, *A Matter of Life and Death*, pp. 24–5.

43 *AMOLAD* contains several narrative ambiguities that could support the contention that the Other World is 'real'. As Peter has not met the surgeon, Dr Leiser, there is no obvious explanation of why he should project Leiser into his imaginary Other World as the Judge. The fact that June – still very much alive – is called before the court is another example of the film breaking its self-imposed rules of fantasy. And June's discovery of the chess book borrowed by Conductor 71 in the pocket of Peter's jacket (was it there when his bag was packed?) remains unexplained.

44 Charles Barr, 'Introduction: amnesia and schizophrenia', to Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays*, p. 16.

particularly the great moving staircase linking the two worlds, bears comparison to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and that, like the Pilgrim Christian, Peter's Other World is a projection of his own ideals ('What do you think the next world's like? . . . I think it starts where this one leaves off – or where this one could leave off if we'd listened to Plato and Aristotle and Jesus, with all our little earthly problems solved but with greater ones worth the solving.').⁴² When Dr Reeves (Roger Livesey) dies and arrives in the Other World, furthermore, his conductor is none other than John Bunyan. Yet this is not an explicitly Christian heaven: indeed, the presence of Sikhs and Hindus alongside the Pilgrim Fathers during the trial sequence suggests that it is a multi-faith afterlife. Ultimately, however, the film's embracement of spiritualism is equivocal. *AMOLAD* offers two different and, on the face of it, opposing narratives of what happens to its protagonist, one posited on scientific rationalism (the medical diagnosis of Peter's condition by Dr Reeves), the other offering a spiritualist explanation (the appearance of 'other worldly' characters, and Peter's 'out of body' experience when he leaves the operating table). However, the resolution of the film combines both the scientific and the spiritualist explanations and suggests that both are possible: the surgeon who operates on Peter is revealed to be the same actor (Abraham Sofaer) who plays the judge presiding over his appeal in the Other World.⁴³

The critical dissatisfaction with *AMOLAD*, and the reluctance, or inability, of critics to engage with its content beyond a superficial level, was symptomatic of changes occurring in British film culture as the war came to an end. Charles Barr has argued that *AMOLAD* is representative of 'a spectacular shift which occurs in British films around this time from the public to the private, with a stress on vision and fantasy'.⁴⁴ Wartime film culture, endorsed by the MOI, had promoted the projection of national unity and social cohesion. The most familiar narrative strategy of wartime films was that of the group of people (servicemen or civilians) from different social backgrounds who learn to work together in response to the national crisis, exemplified in films such as *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*, *Millions Like Us* and *The Way Ahead*. Towards the end of the war, however, the narrative of public duty began to be replaced in popular (if not critical) esteem by the narrative of personal desire, exemplified pre-eminently by the Gainsborough costume films like *The Man in Grey* (Leslie Arliss, 1943) and *The Wicked Lady* (Leslie Arliss, 1945). There is a sense in which *AMOLAD* represents, symbolically, the passing of the war film (again, the fact that it is set so close to the end of the war is significant) and a return to normalcy. It embodies the shift from the public to the private (a heterosexual love story) where it is no longer necessary to subordinate personal desire to duty. To this extent *AMOLAD* bears affinities with other end-of-war films, such as the Ealing portmanteau piece *Dead of Night* (1945), in which the narrative turns out to have been one character's dream, and *Brief Encounter*, which, for all its

centrality to the discourse of 'quality', is just as much about the personal and the subjective as *AMOLAD*.

Yet the response to *AMOLAD* indicates that British critics were far more comfortable in dealing with the public than the private. This explains their dismissal of the romance story of *AMOLAD* as trivial, and sheds light on the minor controversy that erupted over its selection for the Royal Film Performance. *AMOLAD* was deemed an inappropriate choice for a number of reasons. For some, it was simply unrepresentative of the British 'quality film'. Winnington, for example, suggested that 'there are . . . better and more fitting new British films for such an occasion'.⁴⁵ This view was endorsed from, of all sources, the *Daily Worker* – official mouthpiece of the Communist Party of Great Britain – which declared that *AMOLAD* was 'thin and pretentious' and that it 'represents in no way any sort of advance in the British cinema which is being made and in evidence'.⁴⁶ For others, however, nothing less than national pride was at stake. The trade press, for instance, felt let down that the special 'show' preceding the film – a cavalcade of film history that included the screening of extracts from *The Champ*, *Broadway Melody*, *Cavalcade* and the 1945 Academy Award-winner *The Lost Weekend* – privileged Hollywood films and 'paid no tribute at all to the pioneers in this country who made the business of today possible'.⁴⁷ It should be noted in this context that the institution of the Royal Film Performance (the first had in fact been planned for 1939 but was postponed upon the outbreak of war) was one element in a bid to assert the cultural legitimacy of cinema in Britain in the late 1940s. The other key event in this process was the establishment in 1947 of the British Film Academy. It is significant that the first three choices for the award of Best British Film all went to films that belonged squarely to the 'quality' paradigm: Carol Reed's *Odd Man Out* (1947), *The Fallen Idol* (1948) and *The Third Man* (1949).

Elsewhere, however, it was the cultural politics of *AMOLAD* that provoked censure. In particular, references to the American War of Independence and to the inglorious past of the British Empire were felt to be in poor taste and hardly calculated to help Anglo-US relations. This complaint was not confined to the film review columns. It is ironic that a film intended to promote the 'special relationship' between Great Britain and the USA became a site of cultural contestation for what some commentators perceived as its biased and unfair representation of that relationship. An editorial in the *Daily Graphic* pontificated:

Old feuds, old grudges, old hatreds are revived in one scene of this film in a manner which is entirely unnecessary and irrelevant to the plot. Ancient charges against British 'imperialism' which, for the most part, never had any real substance, are paraded – and no defence is offered. So an impression is conveyed well calculated to confirm and strengthen whatever false ideas of this country and its history Isolationist propaganda may already have implanted in the American mind. . . . A film of this kind can contribute nothing to international

⁴⁵ *News Chronicle*,
22 November 1946.

⁴⁶ John Ross, 'The film was not best choice', *Daily Worker*,
2 November 1946.

⁴⁷ *Kinematograph Weekly*,
7 November 1946, p. 4.

48 'Unhappy choice', *Daily Graphic*,
2 November 1946, p. 2.

understanding. It is a pity that it should cross the Atlantic carrying the cachet which comes from its showing on such an occasion as last night's.⁴⁸

This reaction reads *AMOLAD* in precisely the opposite way to that which was intended, though it is highly unlikely that the editorial writer of the *Daily Graphic* would have been aware that the suggestion to make 'a big film' on the theme of Anglo-US relations came from an official government agency.

The trial sequence of *AMOLAD* is the occasion for the rehearsal of ideological and cultural debates between Britain and the USA. The prosecuting counsel Abraham Farlan (Raymond Massey) – the first American killed by a British bullet during the War of Independence – bases his argument on the notion that national identity is a purely naturalized phenomenon and that all men's characters are conditioned by their national background ('We are all as God made us, sir, but our ancestors had a deal to do with the shaping of us'). In this argument it is not only Peter but England (the film refers to 'England' rather than 'Britain') which is on trial. Farlan airs old grievances such as the Boston Tea Party as well as referring to 'a certain report on England by five members of the United States Senate in 1944'. He asserts the view, held by many Americans, that Britain was a class-based society and not a genuine democracy, and expresses the fear of US isolationists that the USA had been dragged into World War II in defence of the British Empire ('When in the course of human events our men and women came to your country as your allies it was not to become your prisoners').

This sequence was too much for the reviewer of *Today's Cinema* who, despite his admiration for the film as a technical achievement, felt that '[it] is not to the picture's credit that it completely fails to give an answer to the Bostonian's bitter political arraignment'.⁴⁹ In fact the film does provide an answer, through Dr Reeves, who has recourse first to a familiar discourse of cultural heritage ('For England I am ready to call John Donne, Dryden, Pope, Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley and Keats, Tennyson . . .') and then to the common cause of both countries in the wars of the twentieth century. Far from leaving Farlan's criticisms unanswered, *AMOLAD* engages in a debate of the merits of British and US democracy ('I doubt if you have more practical freedoms in America than we do in England. An Englishman thinks as he likes in religion and in politics.') What *AMOLAD* expresses is the notion of a common culture between Britain and the USA based on shared notions of personal freedom, liberalism and parliamentary democracy. This was a recurring feature of wartime political discourse and was a prominent theme of the propaganda efforts of both countries. In one of his regular broadcasts on the BBC's North American Service in 1940, for example, Leslie Howard quoted approvingly the words of the Declaration of Independence and assured his US listeners: 'There is something in the foundations of American liberty and in the birth of the American nation, to which every

49 *Today's Cinema*,
5 November 1946, p. 3.

50 Quoted in Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, p. 71.

51 E.W. and M.M. Robson, *The Shame and Disgrace of Colonel Blimp: the True Story of the Film* (London: The Sidneyan Society, 1944), p. 3.

52 E.W. and M.M. Robson, *The World Is My Cinema* (London: The Sidneyan Society, 1947), p. 65.

53 Ibid.

54 Christie, *A Matter of Life and Death*, p. 65.

British soul must by its very nature respond.⁵⁰ Hollywood returned the compliment at the end of *Sherlock Holmes in Washington* (Roy William Neill, 1942), which had Basil Rathbone's Great Detective quoting from Churchill's speech to the US Congress looking forward to the day 'when the British and American people will, for their own security and the good of all, walk together in majesty, in justice and in peace'.

The charge, albeit misdirected, that *AMOLAD* exhibited an anti-British bias found its most extreme expression from the rightwing sociological critics E.W. and M.M. Robson. The Robsons (about whom little seems to be known) exhibited an irrational hatred of Powell and Pressburger's films that bordered on the hysterical. They had already decried *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* as 'the most disgraceful production that has ever emanated from a British film studio'.⁵¹ Their wrath on that occasion had been aroused by the suggestion that the British had anything to learn from the Germans when it came to the conduct of total war; they had taken particular exception to the characterization of a 'good' German whose (mild) criticisms of the British character they considered beyond the pale. Following *Colonel Blimp*, Powell and Pressburger were Public Enemy No. 1 as far as the Robsons were concerned. *AMOLAD* was subjected to a similar dose of Robson vitriol in their self-published book *The World Is My Cinema* (1947). The film was, they claimed, nothing less than an attempt 'to do during peace what the Goebbels-Hitler-Himmler crew failed to do in the war – bash the British in the sight of our Allies and create mischief between us and the Americans'.⁵² They objected in particular to the anti-British sentiments aired in the film and argued that it – and most other British films for that matter – gave a false impression of Britain due to the influence of 'Central Europeans' (such as the Hungarian emigre Pressburger) in the British film industry. They argued, furthermore, that the entire Powell–Pressburger *oeuvre* exhibited 'a rabid anti-Britishism which was almost pathological in its intensity' and expressed their concern 'at the slanders about the British that are being fed to cinema patrons overseas by films of the Powell–Pressburger school'.⁵³

Due to the extremity of their views, it is too easy to dismiss the Robsons as 'a minor curiosity of Powell–Pressburger scholarship'.⁵⁴ It is difficult to say how widely they were read (*The World Is My Cinema* was a handsomely-produced jacketed hardback selling at twelve shillings and sixpence, suggesting that it was intended for a narrower readership than, say, Roger Manvell's Penguin paperback *Film*, which sold for two shillings). Their reading of *AMOLAD* might be 'paranoid rubbish' to modern eyes, but at the time it was simply the most extreme of several similar readings that also included the mass-circulation press (the *Daily Graphic*) and, significantly, was shared between the political right (the Robsons themselves) and the political left (the *Daily Worker*). Furthermore, it was the Robsons who first posited a contextual reading of *AMOLAD* that saw the film's 'Other World' as a metaphor and which became a feature of historical discourses around the film.

⁵⁵ Robson and Robson, *The World Is My Cinema*, p. 68.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁵⁷ Durnat, *A Mirror for England*, pp. 29–30.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Nicholas Pronay, 'The land of promise': the projection of peace aims in Britain', in K.R.M. Short (ed.), *Film and Radio Propaganda in World War II* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), pp. 51–77.

The Robsons' reading of the Other World is characteristically absurd: they see it in terms of the Nazi 'New World Order'. The design of the vast court, they aver, 'is nothing more than a mental hotch-potch of the old Reichstag circular interior, and the later Nazi Party Rally exterior circus at Nuremberg', while the film depicts 'a Heaven presided over by a Brunhilda type goddess [*sic*] straight from Wagner's *Nibelungen Saga*, who rules over and commands a dead slave population in exactly the same way as Hitler'.⁵⁵ Their interpretation becomes even more tendentious as they elaborate:

The German word for Heaven is *Himmel*. The man who sent people to Heaven in Nazi Germany was the Gestapo chief Himmler. Himmler had the record of every man, woman and child carefully ticketed and docketed in the German files. . . . Is it a coincidence, then, that the Heavenly Messenger in the film works under the direction of the Heavenly Department of Records?⁵⁶

Contrary to the notion that all texts are open to multiple readings, I would argue that, in this case at least, the textual evidence of the film itself invalidates this particular interpretation. If the Other World were as Nazified as the Robsons suggest, then surely Peter would not have been allowed to appeal? And even if he had, the trial would have been rigged. The suggestion that the Other World of *AMOLAD* is a metaphor for the terror apparatus of the Nazi state simply does not stand up to scrutiny.

It was that most idiosyncratic of commentators, Raymond Durnat, who first posited a reading of *AMOLAD* that located it in the context of British politics at the end of World War II. In this reading the Other World represents not the Nazi 'New World Order', but rather 'perennial Tory criticisms of the Socialist Utopia – the Welfare State':

This Heaven is a futurist Utopia. It's a planned society. It's machine-like (one mounts it on an inexorable elevator, whence the film's US title *Stairway to Heaven*). The stairway is flanked by the imposing, but dead-white, statues of such great idealists as Plato. . . . As Tories claim planning drains colour from life, so, here, the Technicolor of earth pales to celestial monochrome. Heaven's values are those of the collectivity (as opposed to the selfless individualism of romantic love). Planned, bureaucratic, idealistic, totalitarian, colourless, theoretic – all these are words the Tories like to use of Socialism.⁵⁷

It is a provocative reading that has found some favour with historians, and to this extent it is worth testing.⁵⁸

There is good reason, certainly, to see *AMOLAD* as being rooted, quite explicitly, in contemporary political discourse in Britain during 1945 and 1946. Peter's description of his own politics ('Conservative by nature, Labour by experience') is an apt summary of the outlook of many British people who voted Labour for the first time in the general election of July 1945. In his war memoirs, Churchill wrote that, after leading the country for five years and three months, he 'was immediately dismissed

by the British electorate from all further conduct of their affairs'.⁵⁹ It was the fact, as much as the extent, of the Labour Party's victory that took many by surprise, though with the benefit of hindsight it is easy to explain why Labour won. It was a vote not so much against Churchill, whose personal popularity remained high, as it was for the future. The main ideological difference between the Conservative and Labour parties in 1945 was over the question of 'reconstruction'. Churchill, no doubt mindful of the empty promises of 'homes for heroes' made after World War I, was reluctant to make any firm commitment to postwar social policy and had agreed only reluctantly to the publication of the Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services by Sir William Beveridge in 1942. The Labour Party, however, had wholeheartedly embraced the recommendations of the Beveridge Report and fought the general election of 1945 on the platform of establishing the postwar Welfare State. It was the Labour Party, therefore, which responded more directly to the hopes and aspirations of the electorate for a better future – the 'New Jerusalem' of state welfare provision and full employment that had been promised in official films such as *The Dawn Guard* (John and Roy Boulting, 1941), articulated in the radio broadcasts of J.B. Priestley and debated throughout the war in the pages of *Picture Post* and the *New Statesman*.

There is a useful comparison to be made here between *AMOLAD* and another British film whose production history spanned the end of the war and the first year of the peace. *A Diary for Timothy* (Humphrey Jennings, 1946) took the form of a 'diary' written for a baby born on the fifth anniversary of the outbreak of war (3 September 1944) and which covered events until VE Day (8 May 1945). The film juxtaposes events at the front (Arnhem, crossing the Rhine, the German surrender) with the home front, represented by four people (a farmer, a miner, an engine driver and a fighter pilot) all facing up to their own futures as the war draws to a close. *A Diary for Timothy* also has its Peter: Spitfire pilot Peter Roper, recovering from injuries and uncertain of what he wants to do after the war ('Perhaps I'll try beachcombing'). It is noticeable that Jennings, the romantic socialist, is sceptical of what the future holds: Goronwy the miner's assertion that 'This time things'll be different' is followed, in a characteristic example of Jennings's intellectual montage, by a shot of a pane of glass being smashed, as if to suggest that the promise of a better future is fragile and that reconstruction may be sabotaged.

AMOLAD is informed by the discourse of reconstruction. The trial sequence refers to social deprivation and poverty ('Two million houses have no windows at all, and frequently the roof and walls are gone with the windows'), while the arrival of a young airman (Richard Attenborough) in the Other World includes an oblique reference to unemployment ('There are millions of people on Earth who would think it heaven to be a clerk'). Peter's passionate speech about 'the next world' is loaded with ideological undertones and might as easily be understood as a comment on the nature of postwar society as it is literally

about the afterlife. In this analysis Peter is caught between two worlds on several different levels: between life and death, but also between war and peace, or between past and future. Is it entirely too fanciful to suggest that Peter's vision of a place 'with all our little earthly problems solved' can be read as a statement about the postwar world where it was hoped that unemployment, poverty and war would no longer exist? Yet the future that the film posits, through its Other World, is problematic. On the one hand it is a world of full employment (everyone has a job), but, on the other hand, it is also a world of excessive bureaucracy (everyone also has a file). Peter's trial, which hinges on the question of the rights of 'the uncommon man' in a world where 'nothing is stronger than the law', articulates Conservative concerns over the Welfare State, namely what was the position of the individual in a planned society and economy? The phenomenon of 'War Socialism', in which the British state had acquired unsurpassed powers over the lives of its citizens (conscription, movement of labour, reserved occupations, fixed prices, rationing), had already, at least in A.J.P. Taylor's assessment, 'turned Great Britain into a country more fully socialist than anything achieved by the conscious planners of Soviet Russia'.⁶⁰ In an election broadcast of 4 June 1945, Churchill asserted that 'there can be no doubt that Socialism is inseparably interwoven with Totalitarianism and the abject worship of the State' and notoriously referred to 'some form of Gestapo' that, in his view, would be necessary to enforce a socialist state in Britain.⁶¹ In so far as Powell and Pressburger's films have been seen as embodying a certain 'Tory' sensibility – evident in their conservative social politics – then *AMOLAD* can be seen to represent a Tory critique of the Welfare State.⁶²

This is a reading that does not seem to have been apparent to contemporaries. It thus illustrates one of the perennial problems of film studies: the possibility that the meanings we read into films may never have been intended by their makers nor perceived by their audiences at the time. As neither Powell's autobiography nor his published interviews lend any support to the theory that *AMOLAD* was a commentary on the Welfare State, then it must of necessity remain a speculative reading. For all that, however, it is a persuasive one, given the social and political circumstances in which the film was made. Films cannot – or, at least, they should not – be detached from the historical contexts in which they were produced and consumed. An analysis of the discourses that circulated around *AMOLAD* would suggest that its equivocal reception by critics at the time was only partly due to the prevalence of the realist discourse in contemporary criticism and had at least as much to do with its cultural politics. *AMOLAD* was a site of aesthetic, cultural and political contestation. What was being contested, as much in the response to the film as in the narrative itself, was how a British film should represent and construct ideologies of national identity and nationhood. This was an especially acute question in 1945 and 1946, at a time when the wartime projection of national unity and social cohesion had ceased to be the underlying ideological imperative of British cinema and when

60 A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 507.

61 Quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Never Despair: Winston S. Churchill 1945–1965* (London: Heinemann, 1988), p. 32.

62 See, for example, Nigel Andrews and Harlan Kennedy, 'Peerless Powell', *Film Comment*, vol. 15, no. 3 (1979), pp. 49–55; Jeffrey Richards, 'Why we fight: *A Canterbury Tale*', in Jeffrey Richards and Anthony Aldgate, *Best of British: Cinema and Society 1930–1970* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), pp. 43–59; David Thomson, 'A romantic sensibility: the films of Michael Powell', *American Film* (November 1980), pp. 48–52.

filmmakers were turning their attention to other thematic concerns. To the extent that what it was 'about' was what commentators like to call 'the question of England', then *AMOLAD* was very much concerned with 'the true business of the British movie'.

Rediagnosing *A Matter of Life and Death*

DAMIAN SUTTON

*The impetus of consciousness, which manifests the impetus of life, escapes analysis by its simplicity. We can however study, in the moments when it relents, the conditions of mobile equilibrium which it had till then maintained, and in this way analyse a manifestation which lets its essence show through.*¹

¹ Henri Bergson, 'Memory of the present and false recognition' (1908), in Robin Durie (ed.), *Time and the Instant: Essays in the Physics and Philosophy of Time* (Manchester: Clinamen, 2000), p. 61.

² David Badder, 'Powell and Pressburger: the war years', *Sight and Sound* (Winter 1979), p. 12. See also Ian Christie, *A Matter of Life and Death* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), p. 42.

In a scene in Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *A Matter of Life and Death* (The Archers/Rank, 1946) Roger Livesey and Kim Hunter play a game of table tennis whilst David Niven sleeps in another room. During the game time itself 'stops', and Niven wakes to find himself in conversation with Marius Goring. As Goring departs, time is 'returned' to its normal passage and a distressed Niven recounts the event to his companions. This striking sequence, shot by Jack Cardiff with a lemon filter to emphasize its otherworldly effect, came from an idea by Pressburger to illustrate how Niven's hallucination takes place 'in space but not in time'.² Niven plays Peter Carter, an RAF officer experiencing the severe effects of a head injury after bailing out of his stricken aircraft without a parachute. His unlikely survival has convinced him that the next world has 'missed' its opportunity to claim him at his appointed time, and has sent its conductor (Goring) to resolve the mistake. In the meantime, Carter has fallen in love with an American servicewoman (Hunter), giving him cause to argue against his 'call-up'. This philosophical (and then legal) struggle is carried out in the other world during Carter's interludes, which his doctor, Reeves (Livesey), diagnoses as being a result of Carter's head injury.

**Dr Reeves (Roger Livesey) and
June (Kim Hunter) frozen in
mid-rally.**



3 Christie, *A Matter of Life and Death*, p. 12. See also the US pressbook for *A Matter of Life and Death*.

4 Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (1966), trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York, NY: Zone, 1997). See also Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (1896), trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (1911) (New York, NY: Zone, 1996).

The table tennis sequence is, of course, striking as a visual effect, as the game (and ball) are stopped in mid-rally, and Niven walks up to the frozen Hunter and Livesey. However, this was not a chance illustration but a carefully organized one – Livesey and Hunter had to train for weeks with British Table Tennis champion Alan Brook, whilst various effects were tested to get the mixture of live and frozen action right.³ The choice is interesting in that, besides illustrating the effects of head trauma (in this case, the dissociative aura of temporal lobe epilepsy), it also illustrates the relationship between perception and time that philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and Henri Bergson have proposed in their description of duration (*durée*).⁴ For them, the homogeneous chronological time that we use in practical life is an illusion of passing (from past to present) as if from one discrete moment to the next. This illusion is used to make sense of the heterogeneous, fluid nature of pure change, or duration. For Bergson this is only really ever perceived internally, such as in dreaming, whereas Deleuze has suggested that it is in the self-conscious foregrounding of chronology that we glimpse this underlying continuous time. As we wait for ‘time’ to pass, it seems to slow down or unfold.

The table tennis sequence is an uncanny illustration of the difference between the organization of time and our experience of it. The tick-tock sound of the ball as it is passed from player to player is abruptly stopped, ball in mid-air, as if a clock were stopped. Time itself appears to be interrupted and the present exists only as an internal experience. What is left is the time of Carter’s mind as he argues and debates with his conductor. Time, no longer governed by movement or sound, is simply duration: as long or as short an impression of being as it needs to be. *A Matter of Life and Death* is therefore a significant film in considering

5 Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p. 37.

6 Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies* (London: Heinemann, 1986), p. 487.

7 Raymond Durnat, *A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), p. 29. See also James Chapman's essay in this issue.

8 Scott Salwolke, *The Films of Michael Powell and the Archers* (London: Scarecrow, 1997), p. 131.

9 Diane Broadbent Friedman, 'A matter of fried onions', *Seizure*, no. 1 (1992), p. 308. See also Kimford J. Meador, 'Emergence of temporal lobe surgery for epilepsy', *Archives of Neurology*, vol. 58, no. 6 (2001), p. 1011.

10 Bjørn Åsheim Hansen and Eylert Brodtkorb, 'Partial epilepsy with "ecstatic" seizures', *Epilepsy & Behavior*, vol. 4, no. 6 (2003), p. 673.

time, the experience of time, and perception internal to time. At its deepest level life exists as absolute change, a duration defined only by the interaction of objects and perceptions. Duration is the foundation of life, a transition or change that is substance itself. Duration, as Deleuze says of Bergson's concept, 'is a *becoming* that endures'.⁵

This unusual aspect of the film – in dealing with the universal philosophical issue of time – is one of many in the film's history. Much is known about *A Matter of Life and Death*, an important film in the careers of two filmmakers who acted as a lynch-pin in the growth of British film studies in the 1970s and onwards. The enthusiasm shown towards academic study by Powell, Pressburger and Cardiff is mirrored by the comprehensive work carried out by Ian Christie, John Ellis and others through publications for the British Film Institute. Because of this, we know of the film's propagandistic conception, at the behest of Jack Beddington, to improve Anglo-US relations after the victory in Europe.⁶ We also know of the various attempts, such as Raymond Durnat's, made to 'read' the film as satire on the bureaucracy of the Welfare State.⁷ In relation to Carter's interludes, we also know of the diligent research Powell and Pressburger carried out as a result of Powell's reluctance to show pure fantasy.⁸ Diane Broadbent Friedman identifies Carter's interludes as complex partial seizures accompanied by an olfactory aura – Carter imagines he smells fried onions whenever the conductor appears. Powell's research had been bent towards depicting a 'neurological condition which would produce hallucinations in a psychiatrically normal man'. In consulting his brother-in-law Joseph Reidy, a surgeon who had worked on such cases with the neurologist Hugh Cairns, he hit upon what was probably a diagnosed case of temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) in a patient with a head injury – by then a condition operated on using electroencephalogram location.⁹ Despite epilepsy never being mentioned, allusions are made to the condition: Carter, a poet, shares the condition with Byron and Dostoevsky, whilst two names offered to him as heavenly counsel – Socrates and Mohammed (who appears as a statue on the stairway to heaven) – are also thought to have suffered from epilepsy. The condition's common association with mysticism, religious visions and feelings of otherworldliness suggest that Carter's injury is an ideal cipher for a fantasy narrative.¹⁰

A similar avoidance is made of any suggestion of battlefield psychological trauma as a possible illness producing these profound affects. Whilst shellshock was not an unknown condition before 1946, mostly because of the attempts made by psychologists and psychoanalysts to understand the condition in the wake of World War I, the issue was a difficult subject for cinema, possibly because the condition shares symptoms popularly associated with insanity. Previous films such as *A Bill of Divorcement* (George Cukor, RKO, 1932), Katharine Hepburn's debut feature, had commingled insanity and shellshock in a narrative clearly based on a common confusion of the

11 Rebecca West, *Return of the Soldier* (1918) (London: Virago, 1993).

12 John Ellis, 'Watching death at work: an analysis of *A Matter of Life and Death*', in Ian Christie (ed.), *Powell, Pressburger and Others* (London: British Film Institute, 1978), pp. 97–9.

13 Marcia Landy, *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930–1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 156.

14 Christie, *A Matter of Life and Death*, p. 44.

15 Herb A. Lightman, 'Two worlds in technicolor', in *American Cinematographer* (July 1947), p. 237.

16 Hector Warnes and Jay E. Harris, 'The mind-body problem from a medical perspective', *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, no. 46 (1986), pp. 138–9.

17 Sallie Baxendale, 'Epilepsy at the movies: possession to presidential assassination', in *The Lancet Neurology*, vol. 2, no. 12 (2003), p. 766.

conditions. For *A Matter of Life and Death*, it is the spectacle of the returned soldier which haunts the film at many turns, exemplified in June's willingness to sacrifice her love for Carter's sanity, which recalls a similar sacrifice made by Margaret in Rebecca West's 1918 novel *Return of the Soldier*.¹¹

These open up one of the problems of film studies in general, exemplified by *A Matter of Life and Death*. With a place at the heart of British film studies – the favourite film of one of its favourite directors – so much is known about it that it seems closed as a text from further analysis. Why reopen the casebook? The answer lies in John Ellis's assertion that, despite all of the fantasy sequences being presented through Carter's stressed condition, 'the film itself makes it difficult to maintain this subjectivisation'.¹² The cause of this has been attributed by both Ellis and Marcia Landy as the film's continual foregrounding of specularity which resists 'tidy interpretations'.¹³ Its references to the relationship between mind and body are made through visual metaphors: the 'evocative architecture' of Reeves's camera obscura suggests the inner, mental sphere that peers out at the world beyond.¹⁴ The mind–body split is further emphasized by the film's most spectacular effects shot, taken as if behind Carter's closing eyelid as he is anaesthetized, described in a contemporary review as 'unquestionably the ultimate in subjective approach'.¹⁵ This, perhaps, is the most fundamental of the film's underlying issues, since the difference between the objective world and the subjective mind is reduced by these metaphors until there is an eventual coming together of both when the heavenly 'court' descends to the operating theatre.

Suggested throughout the film instead is what clinicians describe as an 'interactionist' relationship between the psychological and the somatic: Carter's psychological interludes are a result of his physiological injury.¹⁶ The specularity brings into question, rather than reinforces, the illusion of the mind and body separated, since the heavenly scenes seem to slip from their role as representations of Carter's imagination. Instead we believe what we see, and what we see is heaven. This address to the audience suggests a social context to its narrative of trauma and the effects of war. Furthermore, the commingling of mind and body in the film reflects not only the understanding of the interpenetration of mind and body appreciated by psychological and medical analysis, but a more basic philosophical understanding of perception, space/time, and memory. Like Bergson's examples of time and memory 'exposed' by aphasia (in the opening quotation and dealt with in detail later), *A Matter of Life and Death* serves as a dissertation on time and memory through a fictional prognosis that mirrors an actual one.

In her analysis of *A Matter of Life and Death*, Sallie Baxendale suggests that its depiction of complex partial seizures is typical of representations of epilepsy in cinema, and in particular of the heroic survival by sufferers of post-traumatic epilepsy. Carter is a hero before and after his injury.¹⁷ However, without Powell and Pressburger's

acknowledgement of epilepsy, the diagnosis remains relatively open as to the extent and character of Carter's condition, and the relative effects of physiological and psychological trauma in producing it. This is significant in dealing with *A Matter of Life and Death* as a social text of trauma, as I shall do later. First, however, it is worth considering the depiction of epilepsy itself in the film, since it is from this dissociative condition that important philosophical conclusions on perception, time and memory can be made.

Friedman asks an important question when she enquires whimsically after the unnamed neurologist neurosurgeon who may also have advised Powell on the 'prognosis' of Carter's condition.¹⁸ The question would only be whimsical if Carter's dissociation did not have an apparently recognizable fingerprint. Whilst the 'dreamy state' depicted in the film corresponds with common descriptions of actual TLE auras, Carter's imagining of heaven, his inability to explain his own survival, and the general tug-of-war he has with death, suggests the possibility of a particular condition known as Cotard's delusion. In the 1880s the psychiatrist Jules Cotard identified a condition in which patients experienced feelings of dissociation that included the denial of bodily form and feelings of immortality. By the 1890s, his *délire des négations* had come to be interpreted as the feeling of having died. First identified as a range of symptoms (syndrome), Cotard's was eventually described as a particular delusion that takes over the clinical picture to the extent that it is given primacy over the physical cause.¹⁹ Death is a common theme in complex partial seizures, ranging in one group analysis by Donna Greenberg et al. from fears of another's impending death to feelings of having died, or 'missing an appointment with death'. These are involutions of common feelings of altered reality, dissociation or the 'doubling of consciousness' associated with Hughlings Jackson's famous identification of the auras of TLE.²⁰ Greenberg et al. have suggested that their patients did not have Cotard's delusion because it is normally accompanied by nihilistic feelings – a contradictory urge towards suicide. However, the identification by others of Cotard's as a delusion rather than a syndrome suggests that the only key distinguishing feature is the particularity of the 'delusional interpretation of feelings of depersonalization and derealization'.²¹ Carter, for example, is clearly not nihilistic (he is in love, after all), but he does have vivid imaginings of his struggle with his 'Call-Up'. Most important is the manner in which Dr Reeves is portrayed as taking Carter's hallucinations deadly seriously, to the extent that Carter's appointment with the heavenly tribunal brings forward the operation.

This reflects closely the understanding of Cotard's delusion up to 1939, when it was identified mostly as a combination of 'anxious melancholia and systematized ideas of negation'. The more recent analyses serve to confirm this, and Cotard's delusion is still most commonly associated with severe depression.²² Yet the association in the 1930s with anxiety, and especially the rationalization of the fear of death,

18 Friedman, 'A matter of fried onions', p. 310.

19 G. E. Berrios and R. Luque, 'Cotard's delusion or syndrome?: a conceptual history', *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, vol. 36, no. 3 (1995), p. 221.

20 Donna B. Greenberg, Fred H. Hochberg and George B. Murray, 'The theme of death in complex partial seizures', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, no. 141 (1984).

21 A.W. Young, I.H. Robertson, D.J. Hellawell, K.W. de Pauw and B. Pentland, 'Cotard delusion after brain injury', *Psychological Medicine*, no. 22 (1992), p. 803–4.

22 Berrios and Luque, 'Cotard's delusion or syndrome?', p. 219.

suggests that Carter illustrates a 1930s prognosis of Cotard's delusion. Carter cannot explain his survival, and so he reasons (as well as imagines) that he is effectively both dead and alive.

'What was the cause of your father's death?'

'Same as mine.'²³

23 Eric Warman, *A Matter of Life and Death: the Book of the Film* (London: World Film Publications, 1946), p. 43.

Thus Powell's need for a condition which would allow for believable hallucinations in a 'psychiatrically normal man' is more than met by the prognosis we might imagine given by Friedman's unnamed neurologist: TLE producing complex partial seizures with auras of olfactory hallucinations and Cotard's delusion. The usefulness of olfactory illusions was made clear as the connection between the French conductor and 'fried onions' was not lost on Raymond Durnat, even if the neurological cause was.²⁴

24 Cited in Friedman, 'A matter of fried onions', p. 309.

However, such a piece of interpretive detective work is useless insofar as it does not describe an actual case. Peter Carter is not a psychologically rounded character. Even so, as an invention of Powell and Pressburger at a particular time – the end of World War II – his detailed delineation hardly suggests serendipity alone. Whilst Powell suggested in interview that he liked the idea of the condition's 'highly organized hallucinations', he suggested that too much explanation of Carter's illness was both unnecessary and made it difficult to manoeuvre the audience into a crucial suspension of disbelief: 'so many people had had bangs and bumps during the war and you didn't want people to get too worried'.²⁵

25 Badder, 'Powell and Pressburger: the war years', p. 12.

Whilst this 'stuff-and-nonsense' attitude echoes Carter's last few moments in his burning aircraft, it also echoes the kind of dissociation common to trauma victims, whether exposed to short violent events or exposed over time to constant stress – as in wartime. Carter's condition, fastidiously researched and depicted as it is, seems itself to be a dissociative strategy for the survival of war trauma.

In her analysis of *Forrest Gump* (Robert Zemeckis, Paramount, 1994) and its relationship to psychological trauma, memory and history, Susannah Radstone focuses on the film itself as 'a point of affective identification through which traumatic memory begins to be worked through'.²⁶ Her suggestion – that a film text can provide a vehicle for the reintegration of dissociative disorders on the part of the producers and audience – offers valuable depth to the reasoning behind Powell and Pressburger's use of Carter's medical condition. Like the character of Gump, Carter's dissociation is physically manifest in the questioning of his mental faculties. Forrest's dissociation is blissful; he is not aware of his difference nor his actions and their consequences, whilst the audience is. Alternatively, Carter's dissociation might be described as empathic, since not only does he project his imaginings on the situation around him (as in the merging of operation and trial) but also through the foregrounding of specularity where the audience is encouraged to experience his delusions and empathize with his doubting of his own sanity.

26 Susannah Radstone, 'Screening trauma: *Forrest Gump*, film and memory', in Radstone (ed.), *Memory and Methodology* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p. 98.

27 Warman, *A Matter of Life and Death*, p. 11.

28 Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, 'A Matter of Life and Death – the view from Moscow', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1989), p. 183.

29 See *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2001), vol. 44, no. 2 (2003) and vol. 45, no. 4 (2004).

30 Gadi BenEzer, 'Trauma signals in life stories', in Kim Lacy Rogers, Selma Leydesdorff and Graham Dawson (eds), *Trauma and Life Stories: International Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 29.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

32 Thomas Elsaesser, 'Postmodernism as mourning work', *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2001), p. 196.

33 Radstone, 'Screening trauma', p. 86.

A Matter of Life and Death works through both personal trauma, such as seeing a good friend die, as well as the social trauma of war and its upheavals. Carter's dissociation begins with personal trauma in Niven's first scene, after the camera has panned across the cockpit and Bob's blank, dead face to rest on him. His eulogy for Bob is immediately generalized to avoid personal affection ('They'll be sorry about Bob. We all liked him.').²⁷ Social trauma is dealt with ultimately through the trial, which quickly becomes a debate about the antagonism and mutual indebtedness between Britain and the USA, and attempts to see off this troubled relationship by working through both their roles in Empire and conquest. Noted by the film's Soviet reviewers (though perhaps missed by much British coverage), the debate uses Carter's poetic imagination as cipher, 'structured to embrace the whole of culture and human history'.²⁸

Trauma theory in the form that Radstone uses is a relatively new addition to the methodologies of film studies. Coming from a background of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, it has understandably been championed by journals such as *Screen*, which has devoted three debate sections to it.²⁹ As a screen methodology it orients the study of film and other media towards the general phenomena of psychological trauma, described by Gadi BenEzer as an external event plus its subjective experience, leading finally to pathological consequences.³⁰ A typical understanding of trauma is of a lack of integration of events in the past too overwhelming to confront. This leads to the common narrative of intrusive memories (*hypermnnesia*) that return spontaneously after having been repressed or elided from present consciousness. Crucial to this understanding are the perceived gap between event and its recall, the subsequent vividness of the memories, and the overall tendency to lose oneself in the traumatic event. Trauma victims often feel "enwrapped" in the traumatic experience'.³¹

In cinematic trauma studies the temporal dimension is often simplified to become one of a differentiated past and present, a latency, or 'gap' essential to readings by Radstone and others, such as Thomas Elsaesser. For them, trauma is effectively the delay between the event and its return, in the sense that working through trauma recuperates this gap. Trauma is thus characterized by lack, an event that does not leave a trace but instead leaves recoverable 'non-traces'.³²

This notion of recovery is based on the psychoanalytic understanding of temporal belatedness, Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*, which, as Radstone notes, is 'a particular revision prompted by later events, thus pitting psychical contingency against historical truth'.³³ Thus *Forrest Gump* is *Nachträglichkeit* for its director Zemeckis and the film's reminiscent audience. However, the problem with belatedness is twofold. Not only does it (and Radstone) make an uneasy division between veridical history ('truth') and memory, but it also implies a temporal gap as a necessity, forcing a division between a 'then' of history and a 'now' of the present. Whilst films such as *Forrest Gump* depict historical events removed from the (1994) present by some time, this does not account for depictions of

34 Karen Randell, 'Masking the horror of trauma: the hysterical body of Lon Chaney', *Screen*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2003), p. 216

35 Allan Young, 'Bodily memory and traumatic memory', in Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (eds), *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 97.

36 Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, 'The intrusive past: the flexibility of memory and the engraving of trauma', in Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 168–77.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 178.

trauma as it occurs and begins to provoke dissociation – as in *A Matter of Life and Death*. As Karen Randell has suggested, the fact that the effects of war trauma often cannot be represented does not mean that they are removed from the public consciousness, particularly in the case of a returned (damaged) veteran such as Carter: 'The public witness is the reality of injury', and the male actor 'becomes a point of reference for the continuing presence of . . . the horrific physical and psychological damage'.³⁴ It is difficult to find the 'gap' in such cases between the traumatic event, subjective experience and its recall (signified by the returned soldier), suggesting a different sense of time at work than that which relies upon 'then' and 'now'. The picture of trauma as essentially chronic – as happening over extended periods of time – is reinforced by the role of memory in the transformation of events. This is why traumatic memory is commonly evoked by similar places and situations to the original event (particularly in post-traumatic stress disorder). Memory organizes time into the opposite direction so that, rather than returning from the past into the present, evoked trauma moves back from the present into the past.³⁵

Both the model of spontaneous return and that of backward movement rely on the formation of memory coterminous with the present that will become the past. This notion of simultaneity is suggested by Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart as being characteristic of trauma because of the phenomenon's apparent timelessness – it has been neither transformed into a story nor 'placed in time'. Furthermore, dissociation commonly begins during the traumatic experience itself: 'Many survivors report that they are automatically removed from the scene'.³⁶ This, combined with the evocation of traumatic memories by situations of similarity, closes the gap between past and present in the traumatic experience.

Thus a convincing 'diagnosis' can be made of *A Matter of Life and Death* as 'trauma cinema', in the first instance because of its creation of empathy through cinematic foregrounding, and in the second through its presentation of the personal and social trauma of the returned maimed veteran. For Powell and Pressburger it was useful that the dissociative symptoms of battlefield psychological trauma were shared with TLE, allowing them to displace an ongoing social event onto a 'resolvable' medical condition. Whilst the film does not depict trauma in the typical sense of the return of the past, it instead depicts the automatic dissociation of trauma as it happens, beginning with Carter's withdrawal into poetry (Andrew Marvell, Henry King, Sir Walter Raleigh) and culminating in a narration of his experience: Carter survived his fall because he was in love and was able to rationalize that before the highest court, giving his traumatic experience the flexibility that Kolk and Hart suggest is 'able to soften the intrusive power of the original, unmitigated horror'.³⁷ The question left is thus why some theories of trauma identify a 'gap', whilst others suggest the simultaneity of past/present in trauma as being the dynamic force of its traumatic memory.

The latency required for the theoretical notion of the 'gap' relies upon a distinct sense of 'then' and 'now' which is difficult to sustain. Whilst much trauma cinema reflects paradigmatic real-life trauma cases of intrusive memory, a trauma model based on a pronounced 'gap' is difficult to fit over events as they happen, or in the immediate aftermath. More fundamental still for this proposal of traumatic latency is the nature of time itself, and in particular the time which exists behind the social organization of chronology. For Bergson, the notion of a gap between present and past, the former represented by perception and the latter by memory, is incompatible with an intuitive understanding of time as an indivisible sense of fundamental change. There is no adequate point of division between past and future to create a present, and so time cannot be described in such terms: 'the unrolling of psychological life is continuous'.³⁸ Instead, an understanding of time as a basic and constant alteration of the world must be established. This is time as a 'condition of experience', as Deleuze describes it, from which chronological time is organized.³⁹ To experience this 'duration' is to do so through pure memory, since it is only appreciable internally. It is thus continuous and indivisible, and also heterogeneous since it is appreciated in varying degrees of attention. Released in dreams, this sense of time is useless in practical life and must be formalized or actualized. Most commonly this is done through series or space, 'a set of items laid out end to end',⁴⁰ as Mary Warnock describes it, whilst Henri Poincaré has suggested that the labelling of time is merely by convenience – 'as a botanist arranges dried flowers in his herbarium'.⁴¹ This division of a palpable organization of time from its fundamental base led Bergson to his most famous metaphysical division, that of virtual and actual. The past is real but virtual, and elements of the past are recalled when needed by the present. Thus 'Durée consists in the virtual becoming actual', according to Philip Turetzky.⁴² Everything is remembered, but the constant operation of perception and memory combined chooses the memories most useful to perception for practical purposes. Thus memory-images are always structured by the present, whilst perception always has, as its condition, pure memory from which to draw useful knowledge. This operation is, of course, contingent in the body, leading to Bergson's interest in aphasia, amnesia, paramnesia, and other conditions. Loss of memory, feelings of *déjà vu*, and other dissociative phenomena that are common results of illness or physical trauma help to illustrate how memory works.

These relationships of perception to memory, duration to chronology and virtual to actual, are demonstrated in Carter's epileptic seizures. Separated from their surrounding abstract representations of time, the interludes unfold in pure duration. Carter's experience of time within these interludes is governed by his memory, and throughout the film he is forced to deal with his predicament through a discussion of life perceived through his own recollection. As Reeves notes, Carter's hallucinating 'never steps outside the limits of his own imagination'.⁴³ This is best represented when Carter (through Reeves) is forced to argue over not

38 Bergson, 'Memory of the present and false recognition', p. 47.

39 Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p. 37.

40 Mary Warnock, *Memory* (London: Faber & Faber, 1987), p. 29.

41 Henri Poincaré, 'The measure of time', in Robin Durie (ed.), *Time and the Instant: Essays in the Physics and Philosophy of Time* (Manchester: Clinamen, 2000), pp. 25–9.

42 Philip Turetzky, *Time* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 207.

43 Warman, *A Matter of Life and Death*, p. 66.

only his own past, but also a greater past of the British. The political aims of the film in 1946 give rise to an unfolding of recollection as the past of the British and Carter's own past are contracted. In memory, Bergson notes, we first place ourselves into the past in general, and then into regions of the past, in an operation he called a contraction-image. This past continues to exist as a virtual image; it continues to grow as change endures. It is a virtual coexistence of past and the present that recollects it. In the film, for example, Carter continues to return to the chronological present of June and the others, creating past as the film progresses. As he argues for his life, he draws upon his actions in the past (falling in love with June) that coexist with his own autonomous present – the present of his own perception.

The film then presents the two simultaneous actions as separate, where they would normally interpenetrate. Furthermore this separation is presented as traumatic in itself. For Bergson, memory and perception go hand in hand: 'Step by step, as perception is created, it is profiled in memory, which is beside it like a shadow is next to a body.'⁴⁴ This is normally experienced as if memory is a trace left behind by perception. The most useful memories are called upon by perception – turned towards perception or 'rotated' – from a general contraction of the past ('translation'). Useless memories are displaced as perception moves forward. Trauma interrupts this process, preventing memories from embodying the past. With the momentum of perception halted, memory takes over. As formerly unintegrated memory dominates perception, dissociation becomes apparent. Bergson notes the 'feeling' of memory as a significant part of *déjà vu* experiences, suggesting the powerful affect of this type of recall on perception.⁴⁵ Bergson's final question asks how this situation might occur across pathological cases as well as in everyday observations. A trauma theorist might ask why the gap appears to separate normally coexistent perception and memory, and why this appears as a gap in time.

Dissociation such as this is typical of both clinical and psychological trauma and their effects, suggesting a common cause. For Bergson, such occurrences were the result of a 'lowering of the general tone of psychological life', or a 'temporary enfeebling of a general attention to life'.⁴⁶ These could be 'inoffensive' in the everyday and more profound as part of deeper psychological disorders, finding their corollary in the description of the psychological effect of bodily trauma by Allan Young. A characteristic symptom of sudden shock or fright is unconsciousness or prostration caused by loss of blood pressure – a syncope.⁴⁷ Identified in the nineteenth century, it is possibly the kind of event that produces the most extreme cases of Bergson's 'temporary enfeebling' to which he obliquely refers. If physical trauma disables attention, it could be argued that psychological trauma is distracting through its overwhelming of attention to life. Carter could easily be described as experiencing both: his fall and unconsciousness providing the physical trauma, with the event of his friend's death and the stressful situation of the bombing raid

44 Bergson, 'Memory of the present and false recognition', p. 47.

45 Ibid., p. 54.

46 Ibid., pp. 42, 60.

47 Young, 'Bodily memory and traumatic memory', p. 90.

48 Bergson, 'Memory of the present and false recognition', p. 60.

49 Herman N. Sno, Don H. Linszen and Frans de Jonghe, 'Déjà vu experiences and reduplicative paramnesia', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, no. 161 (1992), p. 567.

50 Kevin MacDonald, *Émeric Pressburger: the Life and Death of a Screenwriter*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), p. 256.

providing enough force to overcome his sense of self. His dissociative signs in the Lancaster – his quoting of Raleigh and Marvell in particular – are illustrative of when the momentum of perception halts, as Bergson describes, and memory catches up.⁴⁸

Dissociative phenomena, such as *déjà vu*, reduplicative paramnesia (experiencing time over again) and identification with famous people, have been noted as aura of epilepsy and also as 'survival strategies' for physical and psychological violence. They are symptoms shared by 'impaired functioning of the brain or the impaired integrative functioning due to psychological mechanisms'.⁴⁹ Powell and Pressburger were sympathetic to this mechanism for 'coping' with the physical and psychological stress of brain surgery.⁵⁰

As this is not a medical paper, it is perhaps unwise to make a 'concrete' rediagnosis of Carter's condition. Carter is depicted as having TLE caused by brain injury as a result of head trauma experienced in earlier life. As his aura, however, did not occur until after a second concussion in which he lost consciousness, it is possible that the physical cause-and-effect depicted 'stands in' for psychogenic battlefield trauma. His complex partial seizures, fitting the pattern of Cotard's delusion sustained after head injury (possibly the 'other' research 'prognosis'), mirror similar events of 'doubling' in non-epileptic cases. Powell's reluctance to depict precise cause and effect, and his keenness to ensure that Carter's episodes have a rational cause, are telling of the difficulty in depicting on film the returned war-wounded. At the same time, the medical rationale creates a distance for the audience in order to 'work through' the profound effects of recent history, as in *Forrest Gump*. Such a distance, or 'gap', is the result of exposing the ordinary operation of perception and memory, and the result of glimpsing pure duration. An intuitive understanding of the interpenetration of memory and life led to Bergson's interest in those conditions of their exposure, suggesting not only that such cases provide interesting illustrations of his philosophy, but also that his view of time provides a valuable insight into the creation of 'latency' or dissociation in physical and psychological trauma.

Strong men: three forms of the magus in the films of Powell and Pressburger

ROBERT MURPHY

It has always been a problem fitting Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger into British cinema. Their flamboyance, their willingness to transgress realist boundaries to flirt with melodrama and excess, their interest in the composed film, their openness to European influences, and their adventurousness with narrative form and visual style set them against contemporary critical norms and aroused suspicion of their artistic judgment. Since their rehabilitation there has been a tendency, as Ian Christie puts it, 'of seizing upon their bizarreness as a stick with which to beat the conservative critical establishment, while avoiding an assessment of that very bizarreness'.¹ Powell and Pressburger are acceptable now, ironically, because they are seen to stand in opposition to the supposedly realist mainstream of British cinema. But what makes their magically resonant 1940s films so fascinating is the way they play with images and motifs of British identity while avoiding patriotic cliché. Powell, the slightly disreputable son of a not quite respectable English upper-middle-class family, and Pressburger, the cosmopolitan Hungarian-Jewish intellectual exiled in England, made an unusual combination, and it is not surprising that their joint vision should be a strange one. Regimental traditions in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), Chaucerian pilgrims in *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), Scottish pipers in *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945), scenes enacted from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), the British in India in *Black Narcissus* (1947), Covent Garden and backstage theatreland in *The Red Shoes* (1948), wartime heroics in *The Small Back*

1 Ian Christie, *Arrows of Desire: the Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), p. 6

Room (1949), squire, parson and eccentric countryfolk in *Gone to Earth* (1950), are all somehow off-key, never reduced to cosy sentimentality. The characters which populate this world defy stereotype and appear intriguingly unique. Women are passionate, sensual, capable and bold. Men, though they wear kilts or shorts, ride donkeys, hear voices, love art and beauty, philosophize, work miracles, and are prepared to sacrifice themselves for love, for nature, for art, are strong, brave and spiritually aware. Other visions of Britain inspire interest in the 1940s: Humphrey Jennings's paternal modernism, the happily class-divided Britain of the Lean/Coward films, the robust populism of Launder and Gilliat, the mixture of socialism and nostalgic sentimentality which imbues John Baxter's films. This is a rich period for British cinema. But Powell and Pressburger's willingness to go deeper, to seek a mystical dimension, has given their films an enduring quality which makes them as relevant now as when they were made.

Powell and Pressburger's vision

Powell and Pressburger's films are marked by an unusual liking for speculative thought and an un-English enthusiasm for art. Powell's 'quota quickies' are inventive and imaginative, though inevitably compromised by their low budgets and hand-me-down scripts. It was not until *The Edge of the World* (1937), particularly in the long, virtually dialogue-less sequence where Andrew returns to Hirta and rescues Ruth and their diphtheria-stricken baby, that Powell was able to deploy the understanding of film language he had learnt from Rex Ingram and the other Hollywood expatriates in the Victorine Studios in Nice.

The Edge of the World brought him to the attention of Alexander Korda, for whom he directed some scenes of the last big Korda production, *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940). But Korda's gift to Powell was to bring him together with Pressburger, and to pass on an ethos that in film anything is possible. Modestly budgeted war films though they might be, Powell and Pressburger's *The Spy in Black* (1939), *Contraband* (1940), and *One of our Aircraft is Missing* (1942) are marked by an originality and visual flair which distinguishes them from similar films of the time.² Ironically, it was the intellectually unsophisticated Yorkshire miller J. Arthur Rank, who gave the pair the opportunity to spread their artistic wings. Rank's financial backing placed no fetters on their creative freedom and allowed them to weather the storm caused by Churchill's hostility to *Colonel Blimp* and the critical derision heaped upon *A Canterbury Tale*. Success with the equally adventurous *I Know Where I'm Going!* paved the way for the extraordinary experiments of *A Matter of Life and Death*, with its opening among the stars consciously echoing Korda's *The Man Who Could Work Miracles* (1936), and the extravagant use of music, colour and design in *Black Narcissus* and *The Red Shoes*.

Another aspect of Powell and Pressburger's vision is their deployment of enigmatic and powerful men. This is apparent in their films with

2 49th *Parallels* (1941) is more lavish, thanks to Ministry of Information funding, but it carries a heavier burden of propaganda.

Conrad Veidt (*The Spy in Black* and *Contraband*) and David Farrar (*Black Narcissus*, *The Small Back Room* and *Gone to Earth*), but is most remarkable in *A Canterbury Tale*, *A Matter of Life and Death* and *The Red Shoes*, where the characters played by Eric Portman, Roger Livesey and Anton Walbrook assume a magus-like resonance.

Thomas Colpeper and the gods of Old England

A Canterbury Tale is very much an end-of-the-war film, with its stress on Anglo-US friendship and its background of the buildup to the D-Day landings. Like many other films made around the time, it focuses on the wider issues of the values Britain and its Allies supposed themselves to be fighting for. But unlike *Lauder and Gilliat in Millions Like Us* (1943) or Carol Reed in *The Way Ahead* (1944), Powell and Pressburger show no interest in proselytizing for an egalitarian Welfare State society. Explicitly linking the present to the past with a witty dissolve from medieval hawk to contemporary Spitfire, *A Canterbury Tale* espouses a mystical view of Britain, where benevolent forces bring about miracles that fulfil the lives of the film's three latterday pilgrims. What makes the film peculiarly odd and unsentimental is that the medium for such miracles is Thomas Colpeper (Eric Portman). Jeffrey Richards calls him a 'latterday Prospero', who 'appears and disappears mysteriously', he 'is seen haloed with light during his lecture in the village hall . . . he seems magical, causing events to happen, manipulating lives'.³ Colpeper is an uncomfortable and by no means entirely likeable figure. A magistrate and landowner, he is respected in the local community and he attempts to convey to the British and US troops billeted in the area the vital traditions embedded in the Kentish landscape. But he is also revealed as the man who attacks women by throwing glue in their hair – a practice for which he is only able to give a tenuous and unconvincing explanation.

Colpeper remains enigmatic and disturbing throughout the film. Powell and Pressburger had cast Portman as the dependable Yorkshire co-pilot in *One of our Aircraft is Missing*, but before then he had played the fanatical Nazi leader of the U-boat survivors in *49th Parallel* (1941). He was to alternate between solidly reliable and disturbingly sinister characters throughout the rest of his career. Here the key is his relationship with Alison Smith, the pert, independent shopgirl-turned-landgirl. Alison was to have been played by Deborah Kerr, who had represented three incarnations of Colonel Wynne-Candy's ideal woman in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*. With her dreamy far-away eyes and her soft auburn hair masking a steely determination, she was set to become Powell and Pressburger's muse. But her Hollywood contract ruled her out of *A Canterbury Tale* (and *I Know Where I'm Going!*), and it was not until *Black Narcissus* that she was able to fulfil her potential. Her replacement, Sheila Sim, is less subtle and less complex, but her pellucid aura and childlike openness adds to the oddness of her relationship with Portman's Colpeper.

3 Jeffrey Richards, 'Why we fight: *A Canterbury Tale*', in Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Best of British: Cinema and Society 1930–1970* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 47.

Alison is young and innocent, but the air of purity that surrounds her is not virginal or asexual. She is proud that she spent a summer sharing a caravan with her fiancé, who is now missing feared dead. The chumminess of her relationship with the two men with whom she teams up has more to do with them than with her. Bob Johnson (John Sweet) is a homesick American GI saddened by the fact that his sweetheart no longer writes to him. Peter Gibbs (Dennis Price) has a reserve that seems to preclude sexual interest in women (and could with hindsight be coded as homosexual). Colpeper, by contrast, despite looking old enough to be Alison's father, is linked by an intense emotional bond that carries a strong indication of sexual tension between them.

Colpeper's traditional ideas of the place of women lead him to refuse to employ Alison on his land, and she is only allowed into the slide-show he organizes for the troops on sufferance. But it is she who responds most deeply to the concerns he raises – a series of expressively lit closeups juxtaposes her face with his – and he later admits that he was wrong about her. In a sequence towards the end of the film Alison wanders over the Kentish hills, hears supernatural voices, and comes across Colpeper lying in the grass. He assures her that the voices are not entirely imaginary; they discuss miracles:

Colpeper: Miracles still happen you know.

Alison: Do you believe in miracles?

Colpeper: When I was your age I didn't believe in anything. Now I believe in miracles.

Alison: For shopgirls?

Colpeper: For everybody. I think being a shopgirl there's more chance of a miracle than being a millionaire.

Alison: I can see you've never been a shopgirl.

Colpeper: Nor a millionaire,

This harmony between them is enhanced when they hide in the grass to avoid Peter and Bob. But what they overhear – the two men expressing their feelings about 'old Gluepepper' and whether or not they should report him to the authorities – unsettles their growing intimacy; Alison is clearly part of this axis working to expose Colpeper as the Glueman.

The sequence is remarkable in both its similarities and dissimilarities with the hillside scene between Portman's Charlie Forbes and Anne Crawford's upper-middle-class Jennifer Knowles in *Millions Like Us*. Charlie expresses the vitality of the upwardly-mobile working class, eager to build a new sort of Britain once the war is over, and he is unintimidated by traditional class boundaries. His refusal to countenance a cross-class marriage until he knows what sort of society is going to emerge from the war still seems a markedly radical statement of wartime egalitarianism. Colpeper is an odder, more eccentric figure and looks to the past as something to build on rather than to reject, but he represents a masculinity rooted in the mystical power of nature, magical in its power to transform.

In *Canterbury*, Colpeper seeks out Alison at the garage where her caravan, wheel-less and moth-eaten, is parked. His suggestion that 'there's something impermanent about a caravan' might be expected to lead to a proposal that she share his settled, timeless existence; but once again there is an interruption. The garage owner rushes in to tell her that the fiancée she thought dead is alive. When she turns to share her joy with Colpeper he has disappeared. In becoming an agent for the miracles which transform the lives of the young pilgrims – Bob's sweetheart loves him after all, her silence caused by her posting to Australia; Peter's smug self-satisfaction is washed away by the experience of playing Canterbury Cathedral's organ at the service for the troops about to embark for Normandy – Colpeper has consumed himself.

Dr Reeves and the power of love

Like *A Canterbury Tale*, *A Matter of Life and Death* is a wartime propaganda film gone awry.⁴ The theme of Anglo-US friendship, touched on in the relationship between Alison and Sergeant Bob Johnson, becomes the major focus of the film.⁵ Peter (David Niven) is an RAF bomber pilot who jumps parachuteless from his burning plane to what he expects to be certain death. June (Kim Hunter) is the American radio operator who makes contact with him during his last moments in the stricken plane. Miraculously, Peter is washed up on an idyllic beach, and when he meets June they fall instantly in love. The film then becomes a strange struggle for his soul, as Peter's hallucinations of being summoned from his earthly existence by a heavenly messenger are paralleled by plans to save him from death by intricate brain surgery.

The magus figure is Dr Reeves (Roger Livesey), a village doctor who is also a brilliant brain surgeon, able to diagnose Peter's acute medical condition. We first see him at the top of his house, a god-like figure surveying the village street through his camera obscura. He obviously likes June – quoting Byron's 'She walks in beauty like the night' as she comes into view – but debunks romantic expectations by adding 'only she's cycling and the sun's out'. Livesey, with his jovial deep voice and his hail-fellow-well-met manner, had starred in two previous Powell and Pressburger films – *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* and *I Know Where I'm Going!* – and had turned down the part of Colpeper in *A Canterbury Tale*. Along with David Farrar, he can be seen as closest to Powell and Pressburger's ideal of masculinity – vigorously robust men with a no-nonsense admiration for attractive, intelligent women.⁶ Livesey's Torquil MacNeil in *I Know Where I'm Going!*, Laird of Killoran, 'subdues nature, or rather survives it, because he has his own sharp intensity'.⁷ At a celebratory ceilidh he pins down the headstrong Joan Webster (Wendy Hiller), 'fixing her with a piercing gaze which identifies her as at once the object of desire and his victim'; later, when she persists in her foolhardy plan to brave the dangerous straits which separate her from her intended husband, Torquil shouts at her and

4 See Ian Christie, *A Matter of Life and Death* (London: British Film Institute, 2000).
5 Kim Hunter, June in *A Matter of Life and Death*, plays Bob Johnson's fiancée in the new material shot for *A Canterbury Tale* to make it more comprehensible for US audiences.

6 Farrar is particularly effective in *Black Narcissus*, in which he impatiently dismisses the blandishments of Sister Ruth and stoically refuses to let his love for Sister Clodagh impede her return to Calcutta; and in *The Small Back Room*, where his tormented, war-damaged hero is supported by Kathleen Byron, transformed from mad nun to an ideal of sensitive, understanding femininity. Farrar's Jack Reddin in *Gone to Earth* is more than a stereotype of aristocratic machismo, but he is too underdeveloped to really come to life.

7 Raymond Durnat, *A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), p. 214.

8 Pam Cook, *I Know Where I'm Going!* (London: British Film Institute, 2002), pp. 41–2

9 John Ellis, 'Watching death at work: an analysis of *A Matter of Life and Death*', in Ian Christie (ed.), *Powell, Pressburger and Others* (London: British Film Institute, 1978), p. 98.

roughly manhandles her.⁸ Like the eagle that bears his name, Torquil is a hunter, though one who loves and respects his prey.

In *A Matter of Life and Death*, Dr Reeves is a more kindly figure, more neutral in his attitude to June than Torquil is to Joan, and without the hint of malevolence present in Colpeper and Lermontov. Peter's fantasies are the dominant and most striking element in the film, and the power of love (crystallized in June's tears at the likelihood of losing Peter) becomes the key emotional trope. Reeves seems to welcome June's attachment to Peter: he takes him into his home, virtually adopts him as a surrogate son, and does all he can to save his life. John Ellis asserts that a rivalry develops between Reeves and June, 'a rivalry of a more or less sexual nature for possession of Peter', citing the sequence at the US base where Reeves expresses admiration for Peter's poetry, and the subsequent scenes at Reeves's home where he and June play ping-pong and discuss the sleeping Peter.⁹ One could draw a parallel with the sequence on the train to Canterbury in *A Canterbury Tale*, where Colpeper reverts to a formal politeness towards Alison and concentrates his interest on Peter Gibbs, the shallowest of the three pilgrims. Colpeper, like Reeves, possesses secret knowledge (Colpeper that Gibbs is destined for the Normandy beaches, Reeves that Carter is a fine poet), which he uses to establish a bond with a young man about to face a struggle with death. But in neither film does this signal a change in the relationship between the magus figure and the young woman. Colpeper goes on to seek out Alison and romance is thwarted only by the *deus ex machina* of her fiancé's return from the dead. Reeves retains his lightly flirtatious admiration for June, and uses her as helper and protege in his attempt to save Peter. They sit together facing Peter as Reeves begins his interrogation, and they stand over him discussing his situation as he lies in drugged sleep. Reeves tells both the young lovers that they must trust him, but it is his command to June that she must step onto the celestial escalator to prove her willingness to die for love which is the final and greatest test.

Reeves might be benevolent, but his project to save Peter and ensure June's happiness is only achieved at the cost of his own life. Clad in black and riding a motorbike through the stormy night, he crashes to avoid the ambulance he has summoned to take Peter to the operating theatre. His fellow surgeon follows his detailed instructions as to how to conduct the operation. Now that Reeves has entered the kingdom of the dead, he can be enlisted by Peter as his advocate in the trial that will decide his fate.

Lermontov and rites of art

The Red Shoes is about a young ballerina who has to choose between her career and life as a supportive wife. The magus character Boris Lermontov (Walbrook) is a sterner father-figure than Colpeper and Reeves, a demonic maestro who offers Vicky (Moirá Shearer) a Faustian pact. He fosters and encourages her, creating a ballet in which she is to

The Red Shoes (1948). Marius Goring as Julian Craster, Moira Shearer as Vicky and Anton Walbrook as Boris Lermontov.
Picture credit: BFI Stills, Posters and Designs.



star. But the ballet tells her own story – that of a girl who is elated with the discovery that she can dance divinely, but who becomes increasingly desperate when the relentless demand to dance drives her to suicidal exhaustion.

For Lermontov art overrides any concern with everyday happiness. As he says of his principal ballerina Irina Boronskaja (Ludmilla Tchérina) when she decides to marry: ‘You cannot have it both ways. A dancer who relies upon the doubtful comforts of human love can never be a great dancer. Never.’ Just as Alison’s and Colpeper’s shared vision of the world opens up the possibility of a romantic relationship, Lermontov is attracted to Vicky when he realizes that her passion for ballet matches his own. She misreads the signals when he invites her to dine with him, arriving in a ball gown to find Lermontov with his collaborators, gathered to discuss the new ballet. But Lermontov’s invitation to her to dance the main role fulfils her desires better than any romantic proposal he could have made. The ballet is a huge success and Lermontov once again invites her for dinner. He is nonplussed to find she is not available, and angry when he discovers she has involved herself with the young composer Julian Craster (Marius Goring), whose talent he has also fostered. When Julian declares his love for Vicky, Lermontov, rather than deferring to the younger and more suitable man, becomes petulant and mean-spirited, criticizing his new score as inferior and dismissing him from the company. Lermontov’s intransigence pushes Vicky to choose love over art, and she marries Julian. Lermontov lures her back but, torn between her need to dance and her love for Julian, she hurls herself from a balcony onto the railway track below.

Walbrook had come to prominence in British films as Prince Albert in Herbert Wilcox’s patriotic extravaganzas *Victoria the Great* (1937) and

Sixty Glorious Years (1938), and represented other good Germans in 49th *Parallel* and *Colonel Blimp*. But he had also starred as the romantic Polish pianist who plays the 'Moonlight Sonata' among the ruins of Warsaw in *Dangerous Moonlight* (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1941), and as the manipulative husband who tries to convince his wife she is mad in *Gaslight* (Thorold Dickinson, 1940). Here he is thrillingly convincing as the driven impresario for whom art is more important than life.

It is possible to regard *The Red Shoes* as a critique of patriarchal society and see its tragedy as that of a woman destroyed by the conflicting demands put upon her by men. But Powell and Pressburger's concerns lie elsewhere. Julian is callow and egocentric, but he acts with integrity: refusing to compromise over his art; drawing inspiration from Vicky to create; deserting the glitter of a prestige premiere to follow her and claim her back from Lermontov. Lermontov himself has a Lucifer-like arrogance and acts with devilish malevolence when he discovers the affair between Vicky and Julian. It is plausible to argue, though, that his possessiveness is not for himself but for his art.

As Andrew Moor points out:

Lermontov's ballet troupe is a creative team, and it expresses the same collaborative ethos of Powell–Pressburger's own company, the Archers. *The Red Shoes* is less a film about ballet than about Art in general, and the transformative power of cinema in particular.¹⁰

His dream is of a creative partnership, not a megalomaniac desire to use Vicky's talent for his own ends. In contrast to Svengali in *Trilby* and Norman Maine in *A Star is Born*, Lermontov is constantly shown (like Powell and Pressburger) as a man who creates through collaboration rather than exploitation. In his autobiography Powell details his harsh decisions to replace longstanding collaborators – notably his cinematographer Erwin Hillier with the Technicolor expert Jack Cardiff on *A Matter of Life and Death* and the great art director Alfred Junge with Hein Heckroth on *The Red Shoes* – in the interests of the creative needs of his films.¹¹

Powell and Pressburger's films (despite Pressburger's supposed dislike of intelligent women) are remarkable for their reliance on proud, determined, capable women. Valerie Hobson is a model of cool resourcefulness in *The Spy in Black* and *Contraband*, Googie Withers and Pamela Brown formidably convincing as leaders of the anti-Nazi resistance in *One of our Aircraft is Missing*. Hiller in *I Know Where I'm Going!* and Kerr in *Black Narcissus* both present confusing mixtures of sensual and brittle elements which make them equal adversaries to the strong men (Livesey's Torquil MacNeil, Farrar's Mr Dean) they come up against. Shearer's Vicky Page shares Hobson's upper-middle-class hauteur (though like Kerr she is a Scot).¹² Initially she is presented as a pampered princess, the sort of woman detested by Lermontov. She surprises him with her fiery passion for ballet, but it is only after he sees her dance in the down-at-heel Mercury Theatre that he recruits her, and

10 Andrew Moor, 'No place – like home: Powell, Pressburger utopia', in Robert Murphy (ed.) *The British Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), p. 113.

11 Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies* (London: Heinemann, 1986), pp. 500 (for Hillier), 628–32 (for Junge). Powell's comment about Junge's impending departure ('I regret to say that I laughed') makes him sound particularly Machiavellian.

12 Hobson herself was born in Larne, Northern Ireland, the daughter of a British Army officer.

¹³ Cook, *I Know Where I'm Going!* p. 42.

¹⁴ Hazel Woodus (Jennifer Jones) takes a similar fatal plunge in *Gone to Earth*. But this is a film that significantly lacks a magus figure. The two older men (Esmond Knight and Hugh Griffith) are likeable eccentrics but unworthy of respect. Hazel believes animals have souls and gives her wild heart to her pet fox rather than the two men who love her, the insipid parson (Cyril Cusack) and the red-blooded squire (David Farrar), who can exercise as little control over her as they can over the rampaging pack of fox-hounds which drives her to her death.

he takes her seriously only after she has proved her capacity for hard work. For her part, her talent and her commitment give her a confidence and an autonomy that protect her from becoming wholly subservient to either Julian or Lermontov. Pam Cook argues that in *I Know Where I'm Going!* 'Joan behaves increasingly like a trapped animal desperate to escape, gripped by an instinct to flee which takes her to the edge of extinction in the Corryvreckan whirlpool'.¹³ Similarly, Vicky becomes like a bird caught in a trap, hurtling to her death in her bid to escape. Like Dr Reeves in *A Matter of Life and Death*, she has to die for the film to work. Reeves's horrific death is followed by a welcome reappearance – still clad in his motorcycling leathers – in the Other World, erasing any sense of tragedy. Vicky's sudden and bloody death – from which there is no happy resolution – is much more shocking. *The Red Shoes*, like Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, is a celebration of the vivid savagery of life and it requires its sacrificial victim.¹⁴

The transforming power of love, of art, of the forces of nature, within a dangerous and unpredictable universe is a theme running through much of Powell and Pressburger's work. Strong men appear in most of their films; what distinguishes Colpeper, Reeves and Lermontov is their omniscience, they are men who act like gods, though they still have fallible human attributes. Colpeper and Reeves both make sacrifices to help the young people whose lives they touch. Lermontov intervenes more drastically – raising Vicky and Julian up from obscurity and enabling them fully to develop their artistic potential – but he also destroys them. In Powell and Pressburger's world nothing is easy and the shadow of death is always present.

Comedy and Eros: Powell's Australian films *They're a Weird Mob* and *Age of Consent*

JEANETTE HOORN

Michael Powell's two Australian films, *They're a Weird Mob* (1966) and *Age of Consent* (1969), appeared at the end of his distinguished working life. They were box-office successes in Australia yet have not received the critical attention they deserve. *They're a Weird Mob* was damned with faint praise by Australian critics and fiercely attacked by local conservatives.¹ A Sydney local councillor wanted to stop the film from being sent abroad because he thought that it characterized Australians incorrectly as 'beer swilling, gambling and indulging in crudities'.² Film critic and historian Sylvia Lawson denounced the film, calling it a 'tenth rate little movie'.³ *They're a Weird Mob* did not get a mention in *The Bulletin's* critical review of films for 1966.⁴ In Europe and the USA the film passed almost unremarked, bar a few generally positive short trade notices.⁵ Contemporary Australian film scholars have not been quick to praise either of Powell's Australian films, and to date there are no articles in print on *Age of Consent*. Judged on their own terms, however, these films constitute key late works in Powell's remarkable career and testify to the complexity of his vision and authority as a director, political commentator and satirist outside Europe as well as at home. This essay will discuss some of the themes raised by the films and the reasons for their popular reception in Australia.

Both films are based on iconic Australian novels that pushed boundaries in terms of the social, political and sexual mores of their day. *They're a Weird Mob*, a 1957 novel by John O'Grady, is written in the first person under the pseudonym Nino Culotta. *Age of Consent* is

- 1 Craig McGregor, 'Fair dinkum: they're a quaint mob', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 August 1966, p. 9. See also Colin Bennett 'Mob's 'orright for laughs', *The Age*, 29 August 1966, p. 5.
- 2 Alderman Wallace, 'That mob offends Alderman Wallace', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 September 1966, p. 10.
- 3 Sylvia Lawson, 'They're a dull mob', *Nation*, 17 August 1966.
- 4 Beverley Tivey, 'Films 1966: a good crop of vins ordinaires', *The Bulletin*, 31 December 1966, pp. 19–20.
- 5 See, however, 'Stan', 'They're A Weird Mob', *Variety Weekly*, 14 July 1966.

Norman Lindsay's 1938 scandalous evocation of an island utopia that celebrated artistic and sexual freedom at a time when the dominant wowsierish culture rejected both. Indeed, the novel was banned in Australia from 1938 until 1962. Powell's interpretation of these two controversial books extends those limits even further. *They're a Weird Mob* challenged the parameters of Australian cultural production, becoming a forerunner of the Australian quirky comedy of the seventies and eighties. It arguably produced a satirical analysis of Australian culture that was widely recognized as accurate, laying the basis for the emergence of a particular style of popular culture and humour in Australia that extended far beyond the Australian New Wave cinema that it clearly influenced. In the film of *Age of Consent*, Powell takes advantage of the permissive sexual climate of the sixties by reworking and extending the reach of Lindsay's novel, which at the time of the film's appearance had only recently been taken off the banned list by the Australian censor. Powell knowingly exploits an 'innocent' image of free love on the Great Barrier Reef through his lushly evocative filming of Helen Mirren in her first film role as Cora.

Powell's two Australian films are outsider narratives about 'the stranger': in *Age of Consent* this is an expatriate artist returning home from New York, and in *They're a Weird Mob* it is a foreigner arriving in a strange land who will undergo a baptism of fire. Both films explore the experience of alienated, denationalized subjects who are in the process of crossing boundaries and, following the *Peeping Tom* controversy, the themes of these films may have reflected Powell's own outsider status. Novelist and painter Norman Lindsay was a famous campaigner against censorship and had attracted the attention of the Commonwealth Censor for his art and novels on more than one occasion. Like Powell he deliberately flouted convention, attacking the church and the state throughout his life. He was particularly loud in his condemnation of 'God's police', the women of the female-dominated temperance movement. Similarly, both films celebrate manly independence: the right to sexual freedom, drinking and an independent lifestyle away from family are considered to be essential 'human rights'. While the films satirize the culture of men on the edge of polite society, they simultaneously endorse the values of that culture through the utopian outcomes that reward their male protagonists.

Gregory Peck read *They're a Weird Mob* while he was in Melbourne in 1958 making *On The Beach* (Stanley Kramer, 1959). Envisaging an off-beat comedy such as *Passport to Pimlico* (Henry Cornelius, 1949) or *The Lavender Hill Mob* (Charles Crichton, 1951), he bought an option on the book in the hope that he might enter the film at Cannes.⁶ All of this came to nothing until he mentioned his idea to Michael Powell. Several years elapsed during which Powell began to raise the funds before joining forces with John MacCallum, director of the veteran Australian theatre company, J.C. Williamson. A British–Australian coproduction agreement was drawn up between Powell and

⁶ John O'Grady, 'Filming the Weird Mob', *The Bulletin*, 22 January 1966, p. 10.

7 See Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper, *Australian Film, 1900–1977* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 238. For a detailed discussion of the film's budget, see Gavin Souter, 'Will "The Weird Mob" make big money?', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 August 1966, p. 6.

8 Some of the discussion of *They're a Weird Mob* that appears below is a summary of sections of an earlier article in which the argument focused on assimilation and race issues. Jeanette Hoorn, 'Michael Powell's *They're a Weird Mob*: dissolving the "undigested fragments" in the Australian body politic', *Continuum, Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2003), pp. 159–76.

9 See McGregor, 'Fair dinkum', p. 9; Bennett, 'Mob's 'orright for laughs', p. 5; Tivey, 'Films 1966', p. 42; Souter, 'Will "The Weird Mob" make big money?', p. 6.

10 Walter Chiari was a comic genius who played a large variety of roles and was outstanding as the melancholic outsider in a number of important films. See Ginette Vincendeau (ed.), *Encyclopedia of European Cinema* (London: Cassell/BFI, 1995), p. 34. He returned to Australia to star in *Squeeze a Flower* in 1970. Despite its sizable budget and launching by the Prime Minister John Gorton, it failed at the box office. See Pike and Cooper, *Australian Film, 1900–1977*, p. 246.

11 *The Making of the Film, They're a Weird Mob* (Dennis Hill, 1966).

J.C. Williamson with a budget of \$600,000.⁷ The script broadly follows the novel, but Emeric Pressburger (writing as Richard Imrie), altered it in a number of crucial ways that broadened the text and extended its universal appeal. Though strong echoes of the rough, almost tabloid quality of the novel persist in the film, Powell added a visual dimension that took advantage of the natural beauty of the city in which the story is set and enhanced the romance narrative. There were no studio sets, everything was filmed on location and Powell chose the most popular and visually spectacular parts of Sydney for his sequences. It is a smarter, more complex and stylish place than it is in the book. The party scene on an island in the harbour, for example, is at pains to present the city in the style of the swinging sixties, replete with expensive sports cars and beautiful people. There is no sign of the famously harsh Australian land. The wardrobes of Kay (Clare Dunne) and her friend Dixie (Judith Arthy), with their matching terry toweling bikinis and beach outfits, are absolutely *à la mode*. Pressburger transforms Kay from the mousy character of O'Grady's misogynistic novel to the polished and feisty heroine of the film. There are scenes spoken in Italian that do not have subtitles, demonstrating that Australian cinema was not entirely anglophone in the 1960s, and the Italian film and television star Walter Chiari sings a song in Italian that he had written for the film, reflecting the multilingual nature of Australian cities in the sixties. In addition, Pressburger and Powell insert some pointed references to indigenous culture that, compared to the novel, present a more radical political position.⁸

In Australia *They're a Weird Mob* was a box-office success – the most popular film of the 1960s. Despite the poor critical reception it broke all box-office records in the first two days.⁹ Part of the appeal of the film lay in Powell's astute casting of Chiari as Nino. A prominent member of Rome's *dolce vita*, Chiari had appeared in some eighty-four films between 1947 and 1968, including a number of popular comedies such as *Io, io ... e gli altri* (1965) starring Gina Lollobrigida and Marcello Mastroianni.¹⁰ Chiari had been suggested for the role by the Australian actor Peter Finch, and Powell flew to Milan to persuade him to take the part.¹¹ One of the reasons for his appeal to an Australian audience was his outstanding sportsmanship, a fact that was exploited to the full in the publicity. News items on the television promoted Chiari as a magnificent athlete. He was shown competing in national boxing competitions and playing tennis, as well as doing the Australian Crawl in a pool surrounded by young starlets. Easy-going and laid-back, it was as if Chiari was more Australian than the Australians. The rest of the cast was drawn from Australian theatre and the television industry. The appearance of many familiar faces, combined with the return of popular Australian actor Chips Rafferty as Harry Kelly, also enhanced its local appeal.

Australian actor Michael Pate and James Mason decided jointly to pursue the idea of making a film of *Age of Consent* after Pate purchased

¹² Charles Higham, 'Torrid love under the arc lights', *Weekend Magazine and Book Reviews*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 May 1968.

¹³ Pike and Cooper, *Australian Film, 1900–1977*, p. 243.

¹⁴ 'Banned book will be filmed here', *Herald Special Service*, 26 October 1967.

the screen rights from the author's wife, Rose Lindsay, following the removal of restrictions on the book.¹² Columbia Pictures provided most of the \$1,200,000 budget and shooting began in March 1968.¹³ At the time Powell's film was being made, the novel was referred to in the press as 'the Australian *Lolita*', no doubt on account of James Mason's role in Stanley Kubrick's 1962 production of *Lolita* as much as for the film's own themes.¹⁴ Columbia produced a slightly different version for the British and US markets, which received a censor's cut in the opening sequence in which James Mason, who plays the world-weary artist Brad Morahan, is seen in bed with a girlfriend from the Brisbane art scene. This version also suffered the axing of Peter Sculthorpe's musical score. Sculthorpe's composition is indeed brilliant, adding to the exotic atmosphere of the film and emphasizing Australia's Asian geography with its Balinese references. A number of small cuts were made by the Australian censor, including the last scene of the film in which Mason and Mirren romp in the ocean. Choosing to work with a text that had been banned for many years created special circumstances for Powell. While the film is clearly supposed to be set in the sixties, a fact which is made immediately clear by the use of John Coburn's abstract paintings shown in the film's opening sequences, parts of Peter Yeldham's script follow Lindsay's novel very closely, creating a number of anachronisms. Some of the supporting characters such as Ma Ryan, played by veteran Australian actor Neva Carr-Glynn, and Nat Kelly, played by the British stage and film actor Jack MacGowran, are incongruous in the context of the sixties. Familiar types from an earlier era, they are something of a throwback in this setting.

Lindsay was an implacable opponent of modernist painting, lampooning it ferociously in his novels and cartoons. While in the novel there is no hint of this, Yeldham's screenplay highlights an anti-modernist sensibility. Brad Morahan is an Australian painter who has been feted in New York and whose work is in the idiom of the New York School. Jaded by success, Morahan eschews the money and fame that his enormous abstract canvases have brought him. He turns his back on the modernist values that he has previously espoused and returns to the traditional endeavour of painting from the model *en plein air*. He undertakes to do this in one of the most idyllic settings imaginable, a shack on Dunk Island, which when the film was shot was still unaffected by tourism. Lindsay's main character is therefore changed in the film from being merely a reclusive artist living on the south coast of Sydney into a radical, a painter in full rebellion against the aesthetic values of the day. This change to the character of the leading protagonist arguably reflects Powell's own experience of working against the prevalent grain of critical acceptability, in particular the dominant social realist aesthetic of British cinema in the early sixties.

Age of Consent and *They're a Weird Mob* are both comedies. While the humour in *Age of Consent* is almost vaudevillian in places, *They're a*

Weird Mob is more roguish and satirical. In particular, Nino is styled as a primitive and his naming, Nino Culotta, is deliberate since Nino is a diminutive for Giovanni and Culotta is a play on the Italian slang *cule*, or bum. This tells us that the story will be a satire in which the newly arrived immigrant will be made to appear a fool, out of place, and then 'taught' the appropriate ways of Australian masculine behaviour. Unlike *Age of Consent*, in which the artist is permitted to maintain his outsider status and in which the values of nonconformism are supported, in *They're a Weird Mob* the stranger has to be made 'unstrange'. He is shown how to adapt to the values of the antipodean society he is entering. This conforms to the interest of numerous Australian governments in the 'assimilation' of new immigrants. The burden of the narrative is to show Nino the main skills that he will need to acquire in order to survive as a 'New Australian', and the first of these is swearing. Barely through the customs hall, Nino is introduced in the first five minutes of the film to the practice of inserting the word 'bloody' into most sentences. After this it is *Les Girls* (a famous nightclub in Sydney), test cricket, shouting, surfing and the proper use of the term 'mate'. Following the melancholy discovery that Nino is jobless and after a peppery encounter with Kay, his future bride, Nino walks into The Marble Bar, the landmark Sydney drinking hole, to drown his sorrows. The main purpose of this scene is to commence Nino's journey of initiation into what was one of the key signifiers of 'mateship' in Australia, namely the drinking ritual known as 'shouting'. Without knowledge of the customs surrounding libations, Nino's assimilation cannot begin and he is swiftly introduced to them. The intimacy of mateship is reinforced by Powell's careful camerawork. The entire frame, for much of the scene, is a closeup shot of Nino and his fellow drinkers, whose bodies are pushed up against each other in the intimate space of what used to be called 'the six o'clock swill'. The following dialogue gives a sense of this 'initiation' scene:

Fellow drinker: Best beer in the world. It puts a gut on you though.
 What do you do for a crust?
 Nino: I'm sorry, Sir, but I didn't understand you.
 FD: How do you earn your living?
 Nino: I'm a writer.
 FD: In Italian?
 Nino: Yes in Italian.
 FD: Well it's your turn.
 Nino: What means your turn?
 FD: Your turn to shout.
 Nino: Why I should shout.
 FD: Because I shouted you.
 Nino: I'm sorry I didn't hear you shout.
 FD: When a bloke buys you a beer its called a shout, see. I shouted you, now it's your turn to shout me.

Nino: I'm sorry but I think I do not wish to have another beer.
 FD: Now listen. In this country, if you want to keep out of trouble, you always return a shout, see?
 Nino: Oh is this a custom?
 FD: Bloody oath it's a custom.
 Nino: Excuse me Sir, it would be offensive for your susceptibility if I buy a drink for you and I don't buy a drink for me?
 FD: It's the worst insult you can give a man!
 Nino (addressing the bar maid): I wish to shout! What do you do for your crust?
 FD: I'm a shift worker down at . . . (turning to bar maid) Hey ! did your hear what he said? Cheers.
 Nino: Cheers.

The major ritual of the film – one even more important than the drinking scene at The Marble Bar – is his baptism in the Pacific Ocean. When Nino attempts to swim in the manner he might have enjoyed in the calmer waters of the Mediterranean, he is promptly taken in hand and given a rough lesson in beach etiquette. Australians, of course, invented life-saving. They developed a militaristic surf-rescue culture that involved marching in formation, wearing particular uniforms and shouting at each other, as though they were actually on a battlefield.¹⁵ Remnants of the culture exist today. It is on the beach that Nino is taken in hand and disciplined into Australian manhood by the 'weird mob'. But in order to enter that world he first has to be feminized, that is, to be subjugated, through a process of bastardization. As the scene of the rescue proceeds, he becomes the subject of physical and verbal abuse. Dragged from the surf, he is subdued by half-a-dozen life-savers in Speedos (Nino wears modest board shorts) and carried up the beach before being dumped in front of a crowd of gawking, bikini-clad young women. During the ordeal he is disparagingly referred to as a 'new Australian', 'a mutt' and a 'drongo'.

The beach scene is introduced by an expansive panning shot of the surf rolling in on Bondi Beach. This is accompanied by an Australian baritone singing a song in a manner that could be identified with a camp sensibility, which includes the lines 'It's a great big country, won't you come and play, beaches sun and silver spray – a peace you'll never know – when a man can be alone'. Here the themes of the virtues of manly independence are celebrated in a way that parallels the ideals of *Age of Consent*. This sudden burst of singing seems at odds with the style of the film. Unexpectedly, as though the film was now a musical, a loud male chorus accompanies the images. These male voices take on something of the role of a Greek Chorus, as the heart of the film's narrative is revealed. This is the second use of a 'chorus' in the film. The first instance takes place in the opening shots when a raucous male choir sings a few verses of 'It's a man's country, sweetheart'. This song is rehearsed again towards the end of the film. The chorus is a device

¹⁵ A cheque for \$5382, the proceeds of the premiere of the film, was presented to Judge Harvey Prior, the president of the Royal Life Saving Society of Australia, by Mrs Norman Jenkyn, who had organized the premiere, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 August 1966, p. 15.

through which the homosocial themes of the film are introduced and, as the film progresses, reinforced. The film's narrative culminates in another brash rendition as Nino wins his reluctant bride, Kay. In the beach baptism scene, Nino attempts to take up the song's invitation of solitary bliss. Just as he chooses a stretch of water to enjoy alone, he is accosted by a cacophony of life-savers' whistles and by a frenzy of waving arms that he mistakes for well-wishers.

Life-saver: Hey you – who the bloody hell do you think you're waving at?

Nino: You waved at me, I wave at you.

LS: Get over between the flags, get over there with the crowd.

Nino: I don't like the crowd.

LS: You new Australians. You're in a rip here, You wanna end up in Lord Howe Island ?

Nino: Where is this Lord Howe Island?

LS: I'm taking you back for your own protection you silly mutt! Here – give me a hand with this drongo.

Nino is clearly not to be allowed the enjoyment of swimming quietly outside of the flags at Bondi – outside of territory 'patrolled' by the mob. Tony Bonner and his blonde compatriots manfully haul the helpless Nino from the surf, his body held aloft over their bronzed shoulders as he protests: 'Let me go! Let me go, put me down, put me down, please put me down!' Here the camera zooms in on the bodies of blonde lifesavers as they discipline Nino, giving him a lesson in socially 'correct' Australian beach behaviour and forcing him to submit to their authority. Adding to the hilarity of the scene, he informs the hulking brutes and the crowd who have gathered to watch him being dumped in the sand, 'I am most undignified'.

His ritual humiliation over, Nino is back on the path to reclaiming his dignity. The comic structure of the film is carried through these rites of passage but also through the romance narrative. Later on in the film, when Nino and Kay are back sunbathing on Bondi Beach, their first passionate kiss takes place, the kiss that cements their relationship. Once more the lucky pair witness the amazing prowess of the Australian life-saver. Kay and Nino watch while a sandy-haired, freckled Australian administers the kiss of life to a blonde female 'snatched from the jaws of death'. This appears to prompt Nino into a passionate display of his own, but before doing so he remarks, somewhat inscrutably: 'As Leonardo once said, on a far Tuscan shore, you don't have to drown to be kissed by a life-saver.' Make of Nino's choice of chat-up line what you will, but this is the scene that signals the beginning of a serious courtship and the eventual narrative closure of the film.¹⁶

In a surprisingly similar way to the sexualization of Mirren's body in *Age of Consent*, Nino is the subject of several erotic sequences in which the camera plays over his slim and well-formed body. After his ritual subjugation on the beach, his body has to be masculinized and this is

16 Hoorn, 'Michael Powell's *They're a Weird Mob*', pp. 159–76.

The eroticized Walter Chiari as
Nino Culotta in Powell's
They're A Weird Mob (1966)



achieved on a building site where he finds employment as a labourer. On his arrival, his workmates compare him to Prince Phillip: 'He's a bit La Di Da', they remark. However, Nino proves that he can dig ditches with the best of them. In a scene in which Powell clearly borrows from Ralph Smart's Ealing Studio film, *Bitter Springs* (1950), about the settlement of the land and the dispossession of its Aboriginal population, Powell adapts a section of Vaughan Williams's dramatic musical score. The part of the score that he borrows comes from a scene in which the Kings, a 'pioneer' family who have set forth to settle a remote part of Australia, struggle with their wagons through unforgiving country. A similar musical score is played over the scene in which Nino, on his first day at the building site, digs a trench with a mattock. The camera plays over his body that is dressed only in working trousers. The camera favours Nino's bronzed and slim torso in contrast to the pasty, freckled and podgy bodies of his Anglo-Celtic work mates. There are many such moments when Nino's body is the subject of an erotic gaze. This is also clear in some of the early scenes, for example when we see him batching in the offices in King's Cross, dressed only in newspapers tucked in an erotic skirt-like configuration, which suggests cross-dressing. In the Saturday afternoon scene in Mosman, Nino is certainly the only object of any erotic interest as he parades in his cream slacks, his belt undone and his tanned chest exposed. His friend's wife, who is seen painting her toenails, runs a very poor second, and her husband, overweight and scruffy, is hard to consider in terms of any erotic register. There are many other such moments in the film (Nino's arrival in King's Cross, the beach initiation) that might lend themselves to a queer reading.

Age of Consent, and *They're a Weird Mob* share an interest in producing texts about outsiders, men who have left their own societies in

Helen Mirren in her first screen role as Cora in Powell's *Age of Consent*. © 1969, renewed 1997 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy of Columbia Pictures.



pursuit of something better and producing that narrative through comedy. In the case of *Age of Consent*, the hero is seeking to escape his successful life as a late modernist painter, and pursue the hedonistic dream of living on a desert island with an attractive young woman as his model. Bored by success, he thumbs his nose at respectability and what is made out by the film to be the fake world of the New York art scene. While the scenes between Cora and Morahan are not especially comic, the two are continually surrounded by comic characters and the narrative is propelled by the escapades of those around them. At the time the relationship between Cora and Morahan was taboo. Yet the painter's interest in capturing Cora's attention because he realizes that she is a perfect model for him – and also, as it evolves, because he likes her – results in impeccable behaviour on his part. He is the gentleman throughout and makes no attempt to seduce her. As a result, the film that might have easily become a tawdry tale of an artist's descent into turpitude is instead, at least in terms of contemporary moral values, quite innocent. While Mirren poses nude in a number of scenes, she has the appearance of not being particularly excited by her task. In an interview, she complained of being at a disadvantage since, of course, the crew were fully clothed: 'I found appearing nude in many scenes difficult. Especially my first one when Cora is asked to take her clothes off for the painting. It would not have been nearly so bad if James and Mr Powell and the whole unit had been naked, would it? But if you're the only one who's got everything off, you feel a complete loner.'¹⁷

The attitude expressed in the interview by Mirren is conveyed clearly in the film by her character Cora. In terms of the narrative, posing as a model is Cora's ticket out of her unhappy home with her demented grandmother, her escape to the bright lights of Brisbane. She appears to

17 Higham 'Torrid love under the arc lights'.

18 Kevin Powell notes that his father was meticulous in filming the painting scenes on the beach in *Age of Consent*. Powell was concerned that he should achieve the best colour values possible, taking every care to capture the natural beauty of the island including its spectacular sunsets. Author's interview with Kevin Powell, Brisbane, September 2004.

take no personal delight in her task, squinting at the camera at times and giving the impression that she might prefer the scene to be over. Morahan spends more time worrying over his canvas than looking at her body, and as a result the relationship conveyed is one that appears to be 'innocent'. What makes the film erotic is Mirren's considerable beauty and her frolicking in various stages of undress in the inviting waters of the Great Barrier Reef. It is the utopian ideals that surround the representation of Cora as a nature girl, the setting on a desert island, the notion of creative endeavour and the director's mastery over colour, that produce the erotics of Powell's film. Erotic scenes are difficult to create and it is arguably the combination of these ingredients, with the reserve expressed on the part of Mason and Mirren, that produces this particular outcome. It may also be influenced by there being only a suggestion of a sexual relationship in the very last shots of the film. Overall, *Age of Consent* is a charming film that seduces the viewer not through explicit sex but through its naturalism, its grand cinematic style and its originality. The camera captures the beauty of the island, its white sands, blue waters, lush bush and atmospheric light in a number of key scenes.¹⁸ Like Morahan, in love with Cora's natural beauty, Powell similarly appears to be entranced by the landscape. Astutely, Powell reminds us that the artist (filmmaker) is not always free to follow the dictates of his imagination. In a key scene, Morahan has finally managed to capture on canvas the image of Cora that he has desperately been seeking. She is lying on the sand, her body merging into the contours of the landscape. When the couple is called away, Cora's grandmother, a censorious witch-like figure, discovers the canvas on the beach and immediately destroys it.

In *They're a Weird Mob*, there is little explicit erotic intent in either the book or the screenplay. I suspect that it was Chiari's personality and handsome good looks, combined with Powell's own sense of fun and provocative filming, that resulted in the erotic affect around Nino's body. Powell's deliberate dressing of Chiari in a skirt of newspapers while he is batching in King's Cross, together with the actor's capacity for camping up the production of his toilet in this scene, creates erotic appeal. It is also Nino's vulnerability at the hands of the mob in the dumping scene at Bondi and in the digging scenes on the building site that produces these effects, together with some very particular camera work.

The playful structure of the film controls the dialogue in *They're a Weird Mob*, while merely underscoring it in *Age of Consent*. The entire script is comedy-driven and satire is its primary vehicle. Nino's aim, unlike that of Morahan, is to be accepted by the community in which fate has cast him. His own encounters with 'the foreign' provide most of the comic potential for the film that turns on the humour implicit in the arrival of a newcomer in a strange land. In local Australian terms, *They're a Weird Mob* presented a witty commentary on a perceived social crisis of at the time, namely the threat that southern European immigrants, who by the 1960s were establishing themselves as a social

19 James Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera: the Story of Australian Immigration* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 21.

20 See Stephen Castles et al., 'Assimilation to integration', in *Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1992), pp. 43–56.

and economic force within Australian society, posed to the old Anglo-Australian power-base. In 1961 Italians had displaced the Scots as the largest overseas-born group in Australia for that year.¹⁹ They were threatening the assumptions of Anglo-assimilationism, namely that Anglo culture in Australia was monolithic and superior and that it was in everyone's interest to adopt it.²⁰ In viewing *They're a Weird Mob*, the general community was encouraged to overcome its fear of Italians by 'digesting' the new foreign element. At the same time, the film was an important vehicle for monocultural Australia to express itself by playing out the old rites of 'mateship'. By invoking a range of archetypal rituals and applying a comic mode to them, the film sought universal frameworks through which to express its themes. Conversely, *Age of Consent* appeared at a time when greater freedom of expression was possible in the more liberal atmosphere of the 1960s, reflecting the more adventurous film culture then emerging in Britain.

Although critically neglected, Powell's two Australian films are remarkable for many reasons. As films, they share a marked freshness and originality now appreciated by contemporary audiences in Australia. Both of the films are in the process of being rediscovered and *They're a Weird Mob* has entered the Australian canon as a classic film, regularly screening at retrospective festivals. They reveal Powell's genius for capturing and conveying a convincing sense of national identity through painstaking attention to location, language and sociocultural rituals. Powell intensified his picture of Australia and Australianess by casting his central characters as outsiders – the immigrant and the artist. Although both films discuss important issues – immigration and prejudice in *They're a Weird Mob*; sex and artistic freedom in *Age of Consent* – they do so through the vehicles of comedy and 'innocent' eroticism. Yet it is clear that despite their good-natured humour and levity, both films are also interested in serious questions such as how the individual, faced with the constraints of bureaucracy and conformism, is able to preserve his or her own freedom and identity. At the same time, while the novels upon which the films were based were both libertarian texts of their day, that libertarianism was more directed towards extending the freedoms of men than women. Indeed the increased freedom of the sixties may be seen to have been directed towards sexual freedom for men at the expense of women's autonomy. O'Grady's *They're a Weird Mob* is stridently masculine, in places offensively so, and this quality is also present in some parts of the film. In *Age of Consent* this masculine centredness is tempered by the fact that Cora's freedom, as much as that of Morahan, is at stake. Her fantasy is to escape the island paradise for life in the city and the film encourages her in that ideal. Powell made more of his female characters than had Lindsay or O'Grady in their texts, representing his heroines as independent and strong and allowing them considerable agency. This adjustment to the role of the female leads saves these films from serious

chauvinism, though both focus on producing utopian outcomes that reflect masculinist ideals.

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The British film debate: introduction

SARAH STREET

On 14 February 2004, a *Screen*-sponsored one-day event on the future of British film policy was held at the Watershed Media Centre, Bristol. The idea very much took its cue from the 'Independent Film Parliament' held in Cambridge in July 2003, coorganized by *Vertigo* magazine and the Cambridge Film Festival, when a number of writers, cultural analysts, academics, exhibitors, distributors and filmmakers gathered together to debate the most pressing issues facing the current film industry. That event was extremely significant in foregrounding questions of production, distribution, exhibition and the role of current policy, particularly the work of the Film Council, in a spirit of lively, controversial debate about an industry whose history has indeed been dogged by charges of small-thinking, aesthetic conservatism and small box-office takings. At Bristol there were formal contributions (two of which follow this introduction) from Sylvia Harvey, Wendy Everett, Chris Chandler (of the Film Council) and filmmaker Alex Cox, who has been particularly vociferous in public discussions about the future of British film. Historically, as Margaret Dickinson and Sylvia Harvey demonstrate, the British film industry has not been the centre of governmental attention and continues to conduct an uneasy relationship with official and quasi-official structures. In recent years there have been a number of significant changes in signalling a more serious governmental attitude towards fostering what the Film Council has termed a 'sustainable film industry'. But as many at the Bristol event argued, the work of this body is fraught with contradictions and controversy, in particular with regard to how best to advance plans for national digital exhibition networks without playing into the hands of multinational media corporations. A survey of the industry's most urgent problems, ranging from enhancing production support to breaking the

- 1 Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State: the Film Industry and the British Government, 1927–84* (London: British Film Institute, 1985), p. 248.

- 2 Geoffrey Macnab, 'Break dancing', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 14, no. 5 (2004), pp. 36–8. See also www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/news.

US stranglehold over UK exhibition, rapidly acquires an uncomfortable association with historical precedent. Twenty years ago the publication of *Cinema and State* coincided with a major withdrawal of state support for British films – gone was the Quota, the National Film Finance Corporation and the Eady Levy, leaving filmmakers with the prospect of a bleak future. The book ended on a pessimistic note:

The change of policy will almost certainly lead to a decline in all film activity not promoted by major commercial interests. It will also mean that in future there will be nothing to prevent these commercial interests from choosing to supply their captive market entirely with imports. Against these odds, British film production may finally lose its protracted but tenacious struggle for survival.¹

In subsequent years British filmmakers indeed faced tremendous difficulties in a cold, commercial climate. The familiar pattern of highs and lows prevailed and has continued to do so in recent years. The Film Council's existence represents for some a welcome reversal of this distant official attitude towards film. Even so, the industry is still extremely vulnerable to fluctuations in both policy and economics: On 10 February 2004 – just before the Film Policy Debate at Bristol – it was announced that a major tax incentive for 'inward investment' in film was to be removed by the Inland Revenue, apparently without consulting the Film Council. Geoffrey Macnab estimated that forty-six films were affected by this decision and the industry continues to debate the impact of the removal of these particular incentives, as well as new tax credits that are apparently designed to support new UK films up to a budget of £15 million.² Reversals of fortune such as this underline the need for public pressure and debate. But they also signal the need for a more extensive re-evaluation of British cinema in relation to broader, European and global economic, political and aesthetic structures. As Everett argues, the problems of the British film industry transcend narrow conceptions such as national cinema. As a significant player in the European film industry, the recent history of British cinema raises broader questions about European identities, how they are represented in films and how to interest a wider public in what they have to offer. What is at stake is more than financial viability, tables of profitability and endless comparisons with the USA. Emergent structures such as the UK Film Council are clearly very much in contestation, generating a culture of interrogation that we might learn from past mistakes and try to overcome some of the industry's historic and more recent problems. Another Independent Film Parliament is being planned, so the debate very much continues.

Public policy and public funding for film: some recent developments in the UK

MARGARET DICKINSON AND SYLVIA HARVEY

- 1 Maeve Kennedy, 'Big budgets boost UK film investments', *The Guardian*, 12 January 2004.
- 2 Terence Blacker, 'Tulips, tax and the death of the British film industry', *The Independent*, 25 February 2004.

- 3 Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State: the Film Industry and the British Government 1927–84* (London: British Film Institute, 1985), pp. 14–19.

During the first months of 2004, film policy appeared twice in the British news in sharply contrasting circumstances. In January a major production boom was claimed after figures were released showing that the production spend had doubled since 2002 and inward investment increased by 85%.¹ In February reports spoke of a deep crisis as, following a change in tax rules, some big productions collapsed on the brink of shooting.² These stories illustrate two recurring themes in film affairs: that feature film production is newsworthy and that it is volatile. This combination has played an important role in attracting government attention, but feature production is only one part of a complex business and the potential scope for policy concerns the whole context in which films are made, marketed, exhibited and received by audiences.

Part of that context is the global marketplace, but for the film trade globalization is not a recent phenomenon. Almost from the first screenings the film business was characterized by fierce competition for foreign markets, and by the 1920s a handful of US conglomerates predominated in much of the world. Britain had proved particularly vulnerable, and producers and politicians were predicting that, if nothing were done, British film production would vanish entirely.³ The government did do something – introducing protection under the Films Act of 1927. And governments have continued to do things ever since, with something of a lull during the Thatcher years (1979–1990).

Our concern here is with present policy and with the past only as it seems relevant. Since the lull of the Thatcher era there has been a steady

increase in government activity, and currently government responsibilities include education, training, research, development, exhibition and archiving, as well as production. Clearly, we cannot address the whole topic here but we intend to focus on two questions: what kind of institutional framework has been put in place, and how is a film identified as 'British'?

Institutions for public intervention

Much of the present framework is a creation of the Blair government, though some of the groundwork was laid by its Conservative predecessor. The Major government (1990–1997) moved away from free market policies, reintroduced tax concessions to help film production, took the decision to allocate lottery funding to films and initiated the Lottery Franchise Scheme. It was also responsible for creating, for the first time, a dedicated government department for culture and recreation, the Department of National Heritage, and for giving it responsibility for film. This was a departure from previous government practice and significant in relation to the perennial debate about whether film is art or industry. Past governments had classified film as industry, except in one or two contexts when it became culture. As industry, it was the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry; as culture it was supported by the British Film Institute and the Arts Council, with funding from the Department of Education and Science.

In 1997 the recently elected Labour government changed the Department of National Heritage into the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and retained responsibility for film within this ministry. Tax relief was extended and Lottery funding continued. However, a reorganization of provision was signalled in 1998 when the DCMS set up a Film Policy Review Group under Tom Clarke, the first ever Minister for Film. The following year the Secretary of State at the DCMS, Chris Smith, announced a rationalization of existing structures, and in 2000 the DCMS created a new Non-Departmental Public Body, the Film Council (now the UK Film Council), and delegated to it most of the department's responsibilities for film.

The Council then proceeded to absorb or bring under its wing most of the public or semi-public bodies concerned with film, although, following the policy of devolution, separate organizations remain in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Council took over the work previously done by the Lottery Film Department of the Arts Council in England, British Screen Finance, the British Film Commission, parts of the British Film Institute (principally the production and regional departments) and also the film-related work of the Regional Arts Boards. The British Film Institute retained its separate identity but was to be funded by and answerable to the Film Council. Funding for film in the regions was also reorganized and, in England, nine Regional Screen Agencies were established, partly financed by the Council. In return the

Film Council received a little over £20 million per year as grant-in-aid and, in addition, around £33 million a year from the Lottery.

	Grant in aid (£ millions)	Lottery (£ millions)
2000/01	21.8	31.5
2001/2	20.9	33.7
2002/3	24.1	32.44

By creating a central administrative body for film, Chris Smith was realizing an idea with a long history. A variety of funding structures for film have been discussed since the 1940s,⁴ and in 1976 a British Film Authority was proposed, though not enacted, with remarkably similar functions to the current UK Film Council.⁵ However, there are two key differences between the old and the new.

Firstly, the main institutions associated with film policy prior to 1985 – the National Film Finance Corporation, the Film Fund Agency and the Cinematograph Films Council – were established and modified by legislation.⁶ By contrast, the UK Film Council was created by ministerial decision and not by Act of Parliament. This is additionally significant considering that the earlier organizations had quite narrowly-defined powers, while the UK Film Council deals with the whole range of film-related activities and both administers and advises on policy, employing a professional staff of ninety. It should be noted that some of the current instruments of British film policy do have a statutory basis and that recent changes have not entirely escaped parliamentary scrutiny. Tax relief, for example, is covered by clauses in the Finance Acts, with current provisions dating from the 1992 and 1997 legislation. Moreover, the grants from the Lottery are sanctioned by the Lottery Acts of 1993 and 1998. As for general policy, the Parliamentary Select Committee for Culture, Media and Sport conducted a review in 2002–03 and its report largely endorsed government action.⁷ None of this, however, counters the point that the UK Film Council has at present no statutory basis. The Council's own documentation mentions 'an intention to move it to a statutory basis at a later stage',⁸ but four years on this has not happened.

Secondly, previous public film bodies reflected in their constitution some concern with the formal voicing and representation of various interests; this is absent or attenuated in the case of the UK Film Council. A comparison with the former Cinematograph Films Council reveals a system of appointments from designated constituencies. These were required to include persons independent of the trade, employees and employers representative of the three key sectors of exhibition, distribution and production. A similar approach to appointments can be found in the case of the proposed Film Authority. By contrast, today's UK Film Council does not give formal representation to different interests. It is a private company managed by a board appointed (under

4 Ibid., pp. 133, 136–8, 170–73; Paul Rotha, *Rotha on the Film* (London: Faber & Faber 1958), pp. 261–75.

5 *The Future of the British Film Industry: Report of the Prime Minister's Working Party* (1976), cmd. 6372, paras 115–125 and *Proposals for the Setting Up of a British Film Authority: Report of the Interim Action Committee* (1978), cmd. 7071.

6 Key acts were The Cinematograph Films Act 1948 and 1957, and the Cinematograph Film Production (Special Loans) Act 1949.

7 House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Committee, *The British Film Industry, Sixth Report of Session 2002–03*, para. 152 d.

8 URL: <http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/aboutus/ourstructure/> [10 February 2004].

9 UK Film Council, *Three Years On: a Consultation on our Funding and Policy Priorities April 2004 to March 2007* (London: DCMS, 2003), p. 7.

10 David Marquand, *Decline of the Public* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), pp. 74, 86.

11 Holly Aylett, Ian Christie et al., 'The independent film parliament', *Vertigo*, vol. 2, no. 5 (2003), pp. 10–15.

the public appointments process) by the Minister at the DCMS. Board members are described as being 'drawn from the film industry and film education',⁹ but of the fifteen current members only one or two appear to be from the educational sector. The resultant bias towards industry interests suggests a possible lack of balance in the pursuit of the Council's twin objectives of developing a sustainable film industry and promoting an accessible and diverse film culture. In more general terms, the appointments to this body may reflect one of the underlying contradictions of British social democracy under New Labour, namely, the tension between an improved and more transparent public appointments process and what David Marquand has called 'the tradition of autonomous executive power' linked to 'the politics of connection and patronage'.¹⁰

The key question here is whether the present procedures – which bypass parliament and dispense with representative structures – raise concerns about democratic process and the implementation of public interest principles. Against any such accusation the DCMS might argue that there has been an abundance of reports, discussion documents and consultations. Thus, for example, in 1998 the Policy Review Group published *A Bigger Picture* and invited responses; in 2000 the Film Council published *Towards a Sustainable Film Industry* and *Film in England: a Development Strategy for Film and the Moving Image in the English Regions*; in 2002 the chairman of the Film Council, Alan Parker, gave his keynote speech, *Building a Sustainable UK Film Industry*, and the Council published *A Better Picture* on specialist distribution and exhibition; while at the end of 2003 there was *Three Years On: a Consultation on our Findings and Policy Priorities*. As well as conducting public consultations, the UK Film Council has defined partner organizations for each of its areas of action, and a series of aims and objectives, together with performance indicators, have been published with a view to meeting the requirements of transparency and accountability. These indicators and related schedules for reporting on performance are specified in agreements between the Film Council and the DCMS and between the DCMS and the Treasury.

All this is certainly relevant to the broad issue of democracy. But consultations are normally part of the process of legislation and should not, we suggest, be seen as a substitute for it. Whatever the outcome of legislation, the associated parliamentary debate attracts a degree of public and press attention which can facilitate the expression of dissenting views and may require governments to test and even to rethink some of their assumptions. It may be because this did not happen that the 'Film Parliament' emerged in Cambridge in July 2003.¹¹ Its recommendations were subsequently discussed with civil servants at the DCMS.

The regime of consultation established by the DCMS and the Film Council can take account of critical views on matters of detail, but it has great difficulty in accepting a questioning of the basic premisses of the

12 DCMS, *A Bigger Picture: the Report of the Film Policy Review Group* (London: DCMS, 1998), p. 4.

13 For example, Gordon Brown, 'State and market: towards a public interest test', *Political Quarterly*, vol. 74, no. 3 (2003) pp. 266–84.

14 Stephen Pratten and Simon Deakin, 'Competitiveness policy and economic organization: the case of the British film industry', *Screen*, vol. 41, no. 2 (2000), p. 221.

actions undertaken. The government's objectives (and their underlying premisses) were outlined by Chris Smith at a very early stage, in May 1997.¹² And these objectives informed the appointment of Stewart Till, then president of Polygram Filmed Entertainment, as the co-chair of the Film Policy Review (along with Films Minister, Tom Clarke). The co-chairs were encouraged to recruit their team predominantly from among the management of the main commercial players in the film world. There was thus a logical transition from the membership and recommendations of the Review Group to the establishment of the Film Council with its decisively business-led board.

This early decision to give commercial interests a dominant role in film policy raises a fundamental question as to why the government needed to get involved at all. If business leaders were working effectively and in the public interest why interfere, and if they were not why trust them to direct government policy? This conundrum is to some extent addressed by general expositions of New Labour industrial policy,¹³ but not necessarily answered to everyone's satisfaction. A study which looks at film in the context of competitiveness policy suggests: 'There is no attempt to lay out in a systematic fashion a theory of when government intervention is and is not appropriate'.¹⁴ In the case of film there is the added complication that the DCMS and the UK Film Council claim cultural as well as economic goals, and an additional rationale is needed for delegating cultural policy to a body run predominantly by business leaders.

While it is clearly necessary for a government to develop a co-operative relationship with the main commercial interests in a business which it seeks to support, it does not seem to us to follow that those interests will necessarily give the best advice on issues of public policy and the investment of public funds. There has always been disagreement within the film world about the key problem of how to coexist with Hollywood. There are many facets to the issue but, put crudely, the argument is about whether British production can and should emulate Hollywood *or* build on its differences *or* do a bit of both. The bigger companies with links to multinationals tend to favour the first option. Stewart Till, the co-chair of the Review body, has been a strong supporter of this view as has Alan Parker, appointed as first chair of the UK Film Council. Thus the decisions taken early on about structures and personnel may effectively have closed the door, for the time being at least, on the possibility of taking seriously the second position.

There does seem, therefore, to be some legitimate concern that the government apparently decided the parameters of its policy without a clear rationale, with minimal consultation and without justifying its decision before Parliament. In making this comment, however, we are not suggesting that consultation and legislation would necessarily have led to a different outcome. It is unlikely that a Parliament with a large Labour majority would have changed anything which the ministers and their civil servants were fully agreed upon and considered important. Moreover, if Chris Smith seems to have been initially biased in favour of

15 Dickinson and Street, *Cinema and State*, p. 138.

16 Ibid., pp. 211–15.

17 DCMS, *Creative Industries Mapping Document* (London: DCMS, 1998); DCMS, *Creative Industries Exports: Our Hidden Potential*, prepared by the Creative Industries Export Promotion Advisory Group (London: DCMS, 1999); DCMS, *Creative Industries. UK Television Exports Inquiry: the Report of the Creative Industries Task Force Inquiry into Television Exports* (London: DCMS, 1999); DCMS, *Creative Industries Mapping Document 2001* (London: DCMS, 2001).

the international big players, he was following in a tradition which long predates New Labour. During World War II, J. Arthur Rank convinced the future ‘Old Labour’ leader, Hugh Gaitskell, to recommend a sudden U-turn in films policy,¹⁵ while in the late 1940s Alexander Korda reputedly exercised a strong influence over Harold Wilson’s plans for the new film bank.¹⁶

Definitions of British film

The definition of a British film is one of the issues underlying the argument about relations with Hollywood on the one hand and the cultural (as opposed to commercial) role of film on the other. And there are some bigger picture questions here about the government’s emphasis on exports as part of its overall strategy for the creative industries.¹⁷ The original impetus for providing a definition for British film was the need to identify which films could qualify for a domestic screen quota, introduced in 1927. The definition has not changed as radically as one might have expected between then and now, except that references to nationality which previously read ‘Commonwealth’ now include the European Union (EU), European Economic Community and countries with which the EU has signed an agreement.

Currently a film can qualify as British under either the terms of a co-production treaty or Schedule 1 of the 1985 Film Act. In this Act the key criteria are:

- that the maker is registered and controlled in the UK or the European Union etc.
- that a specified percentage of the production spend is spent in the UK
- that a specified percentage of the labour costs are paid to citizens of the Commonwealth, EU etc.

This is what we might call a ‘Treasury definition’ as it is primarily concerned with balance of trade and gross domestic product.

The Cinematograph Films Act 1927 had similar criteria, except for a requirement that the author of the scenario be a British subject. This produced a definition more like those in force today in countries like France and Germany, where key creative jobs must be performed by citizens or residents. In Britain the script requirement was dropped in the subsequent 1938 Act, and nothing similar has been reintroduced.

The present legal definition, like its predecessors, has the purpose of establishing which films would be eligible for assistance, and it is in that context we need to consider the practical effects. The requirement for a British producer may suggest that control over the production is centred in the UK. But the clause is too vague to mean this. There are usually several companies involved in financing and managing a film and the contracts between them determine where control is centred. The majority financier is likely, directly or indirectly, to exert the strongest influence – at least in the sense of having made the key decision to invest in that film rather than

alternatives. The majority financier will usually secure most of the profits if there are any. So, all that the clause ensures is that a British company services the production; a US company may exercise editorial and financial control.

The implication of the 'production spend' and 'labour cost' clauses are self-explanatory. The former will be likely to rule out films with British crew, cast and writer if they are shot abroad. The latter can rule in films where key roles like director, writer and star are American as long as enough British or EU labour is employed to make up the required percentage cost. It is clear that this is an explicit intention because the percentage rule is complicated by clauses allowing the producer to deduct the pay of up to two individuals when calculating labour cost, a rule which makes it possible for even more of the senior creative team to be American. The definition is therefore well tuned to meet the UK Film Council's stated objective of encouraging inward investment, but how useful is it for other purposes?

There are other circumstances which require an assignment of national identity, including, for example: entries into film festivals, inclusions in filmographies and catalogues, studies of national cinema, and the preparation of statistical analyses. We will focus here on the last example, as statistics are a key to judging the health of the British film business and thus the success of policy. Is it necessary to distinguish between productions with an important US input and those with only British or British/European inputs?

Answers will relate to underlying ideas about the nation-state and the importance of political and cultural boundaries. During the long period when the legal definition of 'British' changed very little, ideas about the British nation evolved considerably. When the 1927 Act was discussed, Britain was conceptualized by the majority of Members of Parliament as the head of an empire with a mission to make the rest of the world more like Britain. Thus the President of the Board of Trade justified helping a national cinema because: 'The cinema is today the most universal means through which national ideas and national atmosphere can be spread'.¹⁸ A similar point was made in 1938: 'I want the world to be able to see British films true to British life, accepting British standards and spreading British ideals'.¹⁹

Such remarks imply a homogenized ideal of 'Britishness' and are at variance with today's discourse of 'diversity'. Indeed one of the Film Council's stated goals is to 'support and encourage cultural diversity and social inclusiveness'.²⁰ In this regard it is important to note that some of the most admired recent British films challenge the notion of homogeneity, focus on a minority group or highlight a problematic aspect of British life: *East Is East* (Damien O'Donnell, 1999) and *Dirty Pretty Things* (Stephen Frears, 2002) would be good examples of this.

It can be argued that the recognition of diversity within the nation, coupled with increasing economic globalization, has decreased the significance of the nation-state to the extent that the arts and media have

¹⁸ Hansard 203, 1927, pp. 2240–42.

¹⁹ Hansard 328, 1937, p. 1173.

²⁰ Film Council, *Annual Review* 2001/2002, p. 9.

no meaningful national affiliations. To accept this, however, is to devalue politics, for issues that directly affect the ordinary citizen, from the definition of legal rights to the character of children's schooling, are still largely decided within the nation-state. Moreover, the nation-state remains the only forum within which elections – local and national – give the individual some limited influence. For those who would retain and extend this influence, the nation-state remains highly significant. And the diversity of the population within it and the increasing pressures from transnational business simply increase the need for those who live within the boundaries to discuss and negotiate with each other. For this to happen a country needs forms of arts and media which are centred creatively within it, and controlled by people who are part of the discussion. This does not imply anything about content and certainly not that creative work should have a narrow national focus.

There are other definitions of 'Britishness' which may be more useful than those available in film legislation and which certainly have a stronger purchase on the issue of creative control. The British Council considers a film 'British' if it fulfils three of the following six criteria:

- a British producer
- a British production team
- a British director
- a predominantly British cast
- subject matter which informs the British experience
- a British identity as defined by the British Film Institute in the release review in *Sight and Sound*.

The main criterion used by British Film Institute and *Sight and Sound* to assign nationality is the ownership of copyright as indicated in the final credits.

In conclusion we note that – notwithstanding the continuing importance of the nation-state – it would be a mistake to see it as the only defender of a film culture whose creative control is indigenous. The recent decision by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to investigate the creation of a new international instrument or convention on cultural diversity may make it easier for the cultural case for film to be made at both national and international levels. The proposed convention is designed to ensure that the principle of cultural diversity is upheld and has a legal basis in the arena of international negotiations – including those conducted by the World Trade Organization (WTO).²¹ In this regard, UNESCO is drawing upon its 2001 *Declaration on Cultural Diversity* and supporting the view that such diversity is 'as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature' and that the special character of cultural goods and services, considered as the vehicles of identity, values and meaning, 'must not be treated as mere commodities or consumer goods'.²²

In Britain, even without an underwriting from the democratic 'gold standard' of the legislative process, the Film Council represents a major

21 *Coalition Currents*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2004), pp. 5–8.
URL: http://www.cdc-ccd.org/coalition_currents.Fev04/coalition_currents_en.html.

22 URL: http://www.unesco.org/confgen/press_rel/021101_clt_diversity.shtml.

historical initiative, with the potential to intervene at each of the key points in the value chain that links production to consumption. However, where the new body appears at its weakest is when substituting its own at times monolithic judgements for a process of genuine consultation with the various stakeholders who together make up the film industry and the film culture. It is worth noting, in respect of democratic legitimacy, that consultation is not an optional extra to be bolted on to the process of spending public money. Rather, it is a necessary component of accountable, informed and effective practice, and the Council and its Board need to listen to the quieter voices emanating from the cultural and educational sectors as well as to the louder and more powerful voices of a transatlantic business. If the public spending part of the 'British film project' is to be something more than the aircraft carrier for inward investment, if it is to assist in the process of reflecting and revisioning our collective and diverse identities, then it must also grasp the operational principles of pluralism and innovation in the making, distributing and exhibiting of film.

Postscript

On 1 August 2004 Stewart Till was appointed chairman of the UK Film Council, taking over from the Council's first chairman, Sir Alan Parker.

Stewart Till is also chairman and chief executive officer of the distribution company United International Pictures (UIP). On the latest available information, UIP's partners are the US studios Paramount and Universal. These studios are respectively owned by Viacom and Vivendi, two of the largest international media conglomerates. UIP has branches in many countries.

This work was undertaken as part of the research strand on Public Policy and National Identity within the AHRB Centre for British Film and Television Studies (www.bftv.ac.uk). Our film policy research concentrates on the period from 1985 to 2003. The authors would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Board for their support in funding this project and Kathrein Guenther for her scrupulous and timely contribution to the research.

Images on the move: reframing the cinemas of Europe

WENDY EVERETT

In a debate that is primarily concerned with British cinema, it may seem somewhat perverse to focus specifically on the cinemas of Europe. However, I would argue that to understand the situation of contemporary British cinema, not least the problems and conflicts that are central to today's debate, it is essential to situate it within the broader European context. Indeed, it is arguably the case – historically as well as currently – that much of the friction between the expectations of Britain's funding authorities and the intentions of its filmmakers reflects the tendency of the latter to relate British film production to that of the US rather than its European equivalent. If this need for a broader context is the justification for my topic, I should also make it clear from the outset that my concern with European cinema is personal and passionate as much as professional. I watch European films, analyze them, write about them, teach them at undergraduate and postgraduate level, and remain completely fascinated not only by what they have to reveal about the breathtaking potential of the medium to astonish, to reinvent itself constantly, but also by the insight they offer into issues of contemporary identity: sociological, political, artistic, regional, national and personal. And, I would contend, at the very heart of the problematic category of 'European' cinema, is to be found the insecure, precarious, and fascinating case of Britain.

For Britain *is* part of Europe; we share deep cultural roots, historical frames of reference, and ways of looking at and thinking about the world and our position in it. It is striking that the wider the range of European films you watch, the more disparate their linguistic and

geographical origins, the easier it becomes to identify their common concerns. Moreover, the very process of identifying such concerns, whether these relate to the problems faced by directors and producers in procuring finance, the difficulties of distribution and exhibition in a continent whose screens are so massively dominated by Hollywood, or the issues and dilemmas that the films themselves explore, leads you to recognize that the differences and fragmentation that lie at the heart of any discussion of European cinema may in fact constitute its fascination as much as its problems.

It is normal to be pessimistic when considering the present or future of European film. Ever since the heady days before World War I, when European films were so dominant that a single studio in France was responsible for one third of the world's entire film output (Pathé, 1906–13), European films have, despite their variety, their inventiveness, and their cheapness, been perceived as under threat, as, for whatever reason, nonviable. Moreover, this trend has intensified over the last quarter of a century, as the implacable Hollywood machine has spread its user-friendly, easily digestible, non-challenging images to all parts of the globe.

It is, of course, both simplistic and dangerously misleading to posit a them-and-us scenario as the reason for the problems of the European film industry. Any articulation of identity posited on Otherness creates misleading binary divisions and promotes the formation of stereotype. Nevertheless, any assessment of contemporary European film production must be situated within a framework that acknowledges the inherently problematic domination of Europe by mainstream US cinema. This can be illustrated by a few brief examples. In the year 1993–94, *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) topped box-office charts in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Spain and the UK, that is to say, in all but three of the countries whose statistics I was, at that time, able to trace.¹ There were exceptions: France, Switzerland and Sweden relegated *Jurassic Park* to second position, but since this was after the Disney cartoon *Aladdin* (Ron Clements and John Musker, 1992) in France and Switzerland, and *Sister Act* (Emile Ardolino, 1992) in Sweden, they offer only limited consolation in an otherwise bleak panorama.

Four years later saw the release of *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997), at the time the biggest box-office success in the history of film, with receipts totalling €2056 million by the end of 2000. *Titanic* accounted for nearly a hundred million admissions and over €500 million in box office receipts in the EU in 1998. While this was great for Cameron, the cast, crew and, in particular, the financial backers of the project, it was without doubt detrimental to indigenous European cinemas.

If we fast-forward to 2002, we find that all the top ten films (by admission statistics) in Germany for that year were funded in whole or part by the USA:

¹ Wendy Everett, *European Identity in Cinema* (Exeter: Intellect, 1996), p. 13.

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (Chris Columbus, US, 2002)
Ice Age (Chris Wedge, US, 2002)
Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Ring (Peter Jackson, US/NZ, 2001)
Lord of the Rings: the Two Towers (Peter Jackson, US/NZ, 2002)
Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones (George Lucas, US, 2002)
Spider-Man (Sam Raimi, US, 2002)
Men in Black II (Barry Sonnenfeld, US, 2002)
Ocean's Eleven (Steven Soderbergh, US, 2001)
Die Another Day (Lee Tamahori, UK/US, 2002)
Monsters, Inc. (Peter Docter et al., US, 2001)

It is perhaps suitably ironic that *Star Wars Episode II*, which weighed in at number five, was entitled *Attack of the Clones*, for this scenario, of course, was in no way unique to Germany. The picture was more or less identical (albeit with slight variations in the order of the films' ranking) in Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Scandinavia and the UK. Exceptions were rare: Spain, for example, had a Spanish film in ninth position, *El otro lado de la cama/The Other Side of the Bed* (Emilio Martinez-Lazaro, 2002), not overwhelming as a total, it is true, but better than nothing. Only France and Italy provided slightly greater resistance to the general trend, France having a French–German coproduction in top position, *Astérix & Obélix: Mission Cléopâtre* (Alain Chabat, 2002), and an entirely French-funded production at number eight, *8 Femmes/8 Women* (François Ozon, 2002), and Italy including domestic productions in first and fourth places *Pinocchio* (Roberto Benigni, 2002), and *La Leggenda di Al, John e Jack* (Aldo Baglio, Giovanni Storti, Giacomo Poretti, Massimo Venier, 2002) respectively.

That so very few home-produced films make it into the top ten anywhere in Europe demonstrates the extent to which US films dominate our screens. But the problem is far more complex than that, as is revealed by the fact that there is virtually no trace of European films crossing national borders (the exception in the above examples, *Die Another Day*, hardly counts, since despite its UK–US production status, it is rather more American than European.

In the light of such evidence this article might seem to provide a trailer for yet another disaster movie, one in which European Cinema itself is the doomed dinosaur, the vessel heading for the iceberg. This prognosis can be supported by a further selection of relevant statistics, selected almost randomly from a far longer list. For example, it is the case that the market share of European films in EU cinemas has fallen steadily from approximately 60% in the mid 1960s, a period now widely characterised as the golden age of European cinema, to a mere 23%, in other words, less than a quarter, in 2000. Once again, at the heart of this problem is the fact that on average, in 2000, European films secured only 26% of their already meagre box-office takings from

sources outside their country of origin. With a few well-known exceptions, therefore, it appears that European Films do not travel well. Clearly, one of the reasons for this particular problem is that the European internal market is extremely fragmented, with national and linguistic differences continuing to complicate the international circulation of films, which must cope with additional problems of subtitling or dubbing and with the resistance of certain audiences to these elements. Frustratingly, therefore, although the population of the EU (376 million, rising, after enlargement, to over 480 million), constitutes one of the largest markets in the world, European films do not seem prepared to exploit this potential. Again, a number of key reasons can be posited, amongst which, essentially, is the fact that the European film industry remains hugely underfunded at all levels, with production, promotion, distribution and exhibition being equally problematic and unsatisfactory in various ways. The dramatic rise of the multiplex across Europe, while undoubtedly contributing to the encouraging phenomenon of growing cinema audiences and their increasingly youthful profile, has indisputably reduced the number of European and non-mainstream films being screened. The multiplexes have not assumed the traditional role of the independent cinemas, and consumer choice has therefore been reduced. (Interestingly, Italy alone has thus far retained a majority of independent cinemas; however, here too the situation is now changing.)

Certainly, we are all able to cite examples of directors who, despite their proven talent, are unable to obtain the funding to realize their current projects, even though they may already have procured rights, prepared detailed shooting scripts, and even obtained the services of well-known actors. By way of example, we could cite Terence Davies in the UK, Helma Sanders-Brahms in Germany, or Fridrik Thor Fridriksson in Iceland, but it is almost invidious to do so, given the number of directors in just such a position. Even Theo Angelopoulos, despite his status as the father of contemporary Greek cinema, has had to abandon the second and third parts of his planned trilogy because of inadequate resources. The real problem is that if even highly regarded directors such as these cannot obtain the relatively modest budgets they require, what hope is there for younger, less established directors?

A bleak situation indeed. Or is it? The thought was prompted by the recent arrival on my desk of a special number of an American academic journal, *Spectator*, devoted to European Cinema. That in itself is encouraging, as is the general tone of the articles it contains. One of these is written by Steven Gaydos, executive editor of *Variety/Daily Variety*, and an American currently living in London. While this article (and others) contains a number of assertions with which I fundamentally disagree, nevertheless what was immediately striking was its optimistic tone. It quotes, for example, a fragment of a speech given by Tom Tykwer (director of *Run Lola Run*, Germany, 1998) in which he

lists the films that he had been watching at the 2001 Netherlands Film Festival – for example, *Code inconnu/Code Unknown* (Michael Haneke, 2001), *Harry un ami qui vous veut du bien/With a Friend Like Harry* (Dominik Moll, 2000), *Intimacy* (Patrice Chéreau, 2000), *Die Innere Sicherheit/The State I'm In* (Christian Petzold, 2000), *Los amantes del Círculo Polar/Lovers of the Arctic Circle* (Julio Medem, 1998) – before turning to the audience and proclaiming ‘You cannot seriously expect me to speak of a cinematic crisis’. Tykwer surely has a point. The range, number and variety of new films appearing in Europe is nothing short of astounding. No wonder, in these terms, that Gaydos should state categorically that ‘European Cinema is alive and well’, that indeed, ‘not only is there NOT a crisis . . . but a continuing opportunity for both audiences and filmmakers’.² It may well be that there is a better way to assess the current state of European cinema than simply reworking the familiar gloomy scenario, one that instead starts with an awareness of its strengths, and reframes its achievements in terms of the richness, diversity and quality that characterizes European film production in general.

In 2002 some 625 films were produced in the European Union, a total which surely must be recognized as impressive.³ Moreover, an increase in levels of production could be observed in a number of countries, whether in relation to coproductions, as was the case in Britain, France and Germany, for example, or nationally financed films, such as in Austria, Italy and Spain. But of course, to reach any clear understanding of the situation, it is important to look at broader trends rather than the potentially misleading annual totals. They too reveal a number of exciting developments. Between 1990–2001, for example, 251 first-time directors made first feature films in Spain, statistics that compare well with the total of ninety-seven first features commercially released in France between 1958 and 1962.⁴ It is observations such as this that lead Carlos Heredero to draw attention to the ‘rejuvenation’ and ‘revitalization’ of Spanish cinema in the last decade of the twentieth century, in his recent article in *Cineaste*.⁵ Admissions also are buoyant. In 2001 they rose by 10%, and although this rate of growth slowed down somewhat in 2002, there was still a small increase (0.5%), bringing total EU admissions to 933 million. Growing or, in some cases, stable admissions can be observed more or less across the continent, with Finland leading the way with an increase of 18.5%. In fact Britain registered the strongest overall performance, with a total of 176 million tickets sold, an increase of 12.9% in relation to 2001, making it currently the second largest market in the EU after France. And as has already been observed, the average age of cinema audiences throughout Europe is falling.

Another positive sign is the fact that the market share for European films in the European Union in 2002 reached 27.6%. Admittedly this is a long way from the halcyon 1960s, and even a slight decline from the figures of 31.1% achieved in 2001, but nevertheless it constitutes a

2 Steven Gaydos, ‘European cinema: the next hot ticket?’, *Spectator*, vol. 23, no. 2 (2003), p. 5.

3 Catherine Bizern and Ann-Marie Autissier, *Public Aid Mechanisms for the Film and Audiovisual Industry in Europe: Comparative Analysis of National Aid Mechanisms*, Volume 1 (Paris/Strasbourg: Centre National de la Cinématographie/European Audiovisual Observatory, 1998).

4 Roy Ames, *French Cinema* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1985), p. 170.

5 Carlos Heredero, ‘New creators for the new millennium: transforming the directing scene in Spain’, *Cineaste*, no. xxix (2003), p. 32.

6 Data from the European Audiovisual Observatory.

7 Anne Jäckel, *European Film Industries* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), p. 76.

8 Bizern and Autissier, *Public Aid Mechanisms*, p. 70.

significant gain over the 2000 figure of 22.9%, and it does suggest a positive longer-term trend.⁶ There are therefore clear indications of positive developments, and these need to be viewed in relation to a number of European initiatives aimed at helping the industry, for example, the European Union's MEDIA Programme, in its various incarnations: MEDIA (1987), MEDIA II (1995), and MEDIA Plus (1999). While the programme's responsibilities and levels of success have fluctuated over that period, it has certainly helped to establish a climate of closer cooperation between different European countries, and has gone some way to improving areas of training, and distribution. It is thanks to the MEDIA initiatives, for example, that there has been a steady increase in the number of European films distributed outside their countries of origin, and financial support has been given to a range of both new and established directors including Terence Davies, Fridrik Thor Fridriksson, Damien Old, Istvan Szabo and Lars Von Trier. Most recent trends, however, reflect a growing concern with commercial projects, and a decreasing interest in low-budget, more personal types of film.

Traditionally, it is Eurimages, the Council of Europe's fund for coproduction, set up in 1988, that has shown concern for film as an expression of cultural identity.⁷ Between 1989 and 1992, Eurimages supported a large number of films whose cultural importance has been widely recognized, including – by way of example – *Reise der Hoffnung/Journey of Hope* (Xavier Koller, Switzerland/UK, 1990), *Toto le héros/Toto the Hero* (Jaco van Dormael, France/Belgium/Germany, 1991), and *Trois couleurs: bleu/Three Colours: Blue* (Krzysztof Kieślowski, France/Poland/Switzerland, 1993). By 1996, Eurimages's involvement in European film coproductions had reached 46%, and the centrality of its role, particularly for countries with low production capacity, was clear.⁸ Approximately one third of all UK films made in 1994 and 1995 received Eurimages funding, yet despite this, and ignoring considerable protest by British producers, the UK withdrew from the programme in 1996 in a move that, yet again, seemed calculated to isolate directors from their European colleagues.

Among the many other initiatives and developments that can be used to support a more optimistic viewpoint are, for example, the newly created European Film Promotion Board; easily accessible data provided by the European Audiovisual Observatory, the Lumière Database and so forth, making it relatively simple to trace market statistics; a number of new tax incentives designed to assist local industry without excluding foreign producers, and the growing recognition of the importance of festivals in creating professional and public awareness, establishing international contacts, and launching film careers. It is, of course, true that European cinemas still face deep-seated problems across the fields of production, distribution and exhibition, but the broad panorama does provide encouraging evidence, and in the vast majority of national cinemas there does seem to be a sense of optimism, even if

inevitably tinged with frustration. Above all, there remains a fundamental belief in the importance of having our own images, and telling our own stories.

Where then might these contradictory viewpoints lead? In the introduction to *Focus 2003 World Film Market Trends*, published by the European Audiovisual Observatory, André Lange, head of markets and financing, comments:

The Creative wealth of European art house cinema requires no demonstration: it is on display each year at Cannes as at other festivals. But Europe's capacity to produce a significant number of popular films, capable of crossing borders, does remain to be demonstrated.

Quality, in other words, is beyond dispute. What matters, Lange argues, is Europe's ability to sell more popular films (specifically those designed for the adolescent market). Such a statement can usefully be juxtaposed with one made by Carolyn Lambert, head of policy for the Film Council:

The necessity to take the audience into account is gradually coming to the forefront of the filmmaker's consciousness in Europe. Filmmakers are more aware of the need to satisfy audiences. That is a very important step.⁹

What is being suggested, therefore, is that to be successful, European directors must learn to 'satisfy' audiences. While I am hardly the only dissenter from this view, I must emphasize that it is not because I want to fight for an elitist, exclusive form of what is sometimes known in Britain as 'Art House'. But nor do I believe that producing something to *satisfy* an audience is the solution to European problems. Knowing only too well what effect such a policy has had in the USA, there is surely no point in aping (in a far less professional manner), the formulaic narratives of mainstream Hollywood. In many of the arguments currently being put forward by the Film Council and other funding bodies, we can trace this shift in favour of a predictable, safe product that can be promoted by powerful and wealthy organizations. An obvious example is Sir Alan Parker's infamous speech to the British Academy of Film and Television Arts, on 5 November 2002, insisting that British film directors should renounce their 'little England' mentality, should stop squandering lottery money, and tax breaks on low-budget domestic films and embark instead on larger scale coproductions with the Americans (a policy that is being actively promoted in Britain today). Since 'successful' British films such as *Notting Hill* make 85% of their revenues outside the UK, he maintains, we should specifically target this wider (US) market by giving up 'parochial' British films.

His argument is that European films are a failure because they do not produce the profits of their Hollywood equivalents. But low-budget, small-scale films do not, of course, have to achieve so much to recoup their costs. And low-budget, small-scale films are something we do very

9 Gaydos, 'European cinema', p. 9.

10 Michael Chanan, 'Cultural exception, OK?', *Vertigo*, vol. 2, no. 4 (2003), p. 3.

11 Alex Cox, 'Britain is big enough', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2003), p. 6.

well. How does Parker's notion of the parochial relate to the work of directors such as Ken Loach, Mike Leigh or Lynne Ramsay, one wonders, given that their low-budget, essentially local (parochial?) films are so widely revered abroad. Or to films such as *The Full Monty*, which broke all records in the USA even though 'they don't even know where Sheffield is'.¹⁰ Indeed, as Alex Cox points out:

The most successful films of recent years have been the opposite of the focus-group, sequel-oriented Hollywood model. They are surprises which sprang from the warp and the woof of regional production – low-budget movies whose success could not have been predicted. *Trainspotting*, *The Full Monty*, *Billy Elliot* have all been huge international hits. Add to these the international success of *East is East* and *Bend It Like Beckham* . . . and it's obvious there's a large market for low-cost specifically British films.¹¹

I emphasized at the beginning of this article that the differences and fragmentation that characterize the identity of Europe and its cinemas do inevitably pose a number of problems. However, with the slightest shift in focus, they can just as easily be recognized as its fascination. For the heart of European films is the fact that they are quirky and different; they do deal with personal, regional or national viewpoints; they do contain unfamiliar languages and even unfamiliar cultural habits and ideas. But they share something far more important: a recognition of the primacy of images in interrogating and creating our individual understanding of the world and our place in it, and of the importance of cinema in articulating complex issues of contemporary life and shaping our imaginative and intellectual understanding of these issues. This is not the same as saying that European films are *not* entertaining, amusing, and enjoyable for the spectators. On the contrary, they make us laugh as well as cry, and give us joy as well as sadness. But they do so in quirky, individual and essentially unpredictable ways. Far from 'satisfying' us, they are not afraid to challenge, provoke and inspire.

In conclusion, I shall briefly suggest that movement across borders is crucially what so many European films are about. But that does not disguise the fundamental problem to which all discussions inevitably return: European audiences do not seem to want to go to European films. Again, let us reframe that statement. Perhaps European audiences do not go to European films because they have almost no opportunity to do so. They do not so much 'choose' a Hollywood film as have no choice at all. Outside a few specialized independent cinemas and larger towns, European films are simply not screened. So of course we do need to continue to rethink exhibition and publicity. We need to recognize the impossibility of attracting wider audiences if the films in question remain unpublicized and unknown, especially given the massive media hype and prerelease merchandising that goes with the Hollywood product.

But there is also a more fundamental need for education. The skills required to deal with most European films do not stop at the ability to

read subtitles, but involve complex techniques of reading film. First-year students, for example, used to the fast cutting and unambiguous narratives of mainstream Hollywood, are initially resistant to European films. Until, that is, they become hooked, and then there is no stopping them. It is clear that larger audiences will only happen as the result of familiarity, education, and the possibility of sampling the whole range of genres and nationalities that characterize European cinema. This process of facilitating learning needs to be happening at all levels of European society, and should include linguistic and cultural awareness. It is, of course, disappointing that these are precisely the skills that have been downgraded in recent British education reforms, and ironic that such understanding may perhaps be most effectively imparted by the very films we have been talking about.

At the heart of today's debate, of course, is a key question: why does it matter that filmmakers in Britain and the rest of Europe should be able to make the sorts of films they want? Or to put it another way, why do we need a European cinema at all? In the massive changes and upheavals that mark Europe's transition to a multiethnic, multicultural way of life, in a complex present defined by plurality, diversity and difference, more than ever, I would argue, we need our own images, to tell our own stories, to explore our own myths and identities. Unlike more commercially orientated films designed to 'satisfy' both the audience and the formulaic requirement of the producers, films offering a fixed viewpoint and a popular conclusion, European films are open to a plurality of readings, are perpetually transformative in the open-ended personal journeys they offer, and thus capable of celebrating change, variety and difference. They are indeed images on the move.

Parenthood: nurturing and developing the BFI National Film and Television Archive

PATRICK RUSSELL

British culture – and in particular British film and television culture – has much to gain from an understanding and appreciation of the material held by its film and television archives. And its archivists should be leading and dynamic participants in that culture. Just as society in general has a vested interest in good parenting, British film culture should be as passionate about good archiving. Both require that attention should be paid not only to their charges' physical well-being, but also to their intellectual and social potential.

Film archiving is still a young, relatively unknown discipline. It may even suggest to the uninitiated a benign and gently rewarding vocation. Yet proposed changes to practices at the BFI National Film and Television Archive have occasioned intense public debate about archiving within film culture. Given the passions aroused, some of the context and rationale for those proposals need to be explained and appreciated. For me, the steps now being taken at the Archive are positive. This is in part precisely because they recognize its unfulfilled cultural potential. But it is also because their starting point shows a refreshing degree of honesty about the challenges, complex and deeply rooted, which the national collection faces. It would be naive to imagine that there can be a straightforward, painless solution to these challenges. But openly sharing them has to be part of that solution. It is in this spirit that this brief summary and interpretation is written.

- 1 For a detailed history of the Archive (founded in 1935 as the National Film Library) in the context of the global movement, see in particular Penelope Houston, *Keepers of the Frame* (London: British Film Institute, 1994). Houston's is a partial account (and, given its publication date, no longer up to date). Nonetheless, she presciently hints at some of the challenges which the Archive has increasingly had to face.

Context and history

The changes now being implemented are the result of a year-long Archive Review conducted by the British Film Institute, of which the Archive is the largest department. Its immediate context was a 2003 report on the Archive by the National Audit Office, together with a change of BFI management in 2003, initiating a Strategic Review of the whole Institute.

The wider context is today's UK public funding climate, and the expectations placed on public bodies of delivery and accountability to taxpayers. This process has wrought massive changes to other areas of cultural heritage management, notably to museology, which has demonstrably and successfully responded to demands for greater public access and awareness against a backdrop of relative decline in core public funding. Additionally, technological change has particular implications for moving image archivists: the paradigm shift represented by digital technology opens up daunting new challenges. Therefore, the Review is both a response to the arrival at the BFI of developments in public policy that have affected every other UK cultural and heritage institution, and an implied answer to the question of how a publicly funded national moving image archive should reconfigure itself for the twenty-first century.

In the 1930s the Archive was a pioneer member of the nascent international film archiving movement, exhibiting some of its characteristic features.¹ One of these was an international collecting policy dependent for success on a mixture of judicious opportunism and film industry goodwill (necessitating deposit agreements restricting all off-premises access to titles in the collection). Another was an emphasis on preservation expressed through strict preservation rules and a programme of proactive film duplication. This was thought the best means of preserving content held on vulnerable (particularly nitrate) stock. These were sensible approaches at the time, and much material survives thanks only to the collecting and preservation efforts of the Archive's founders.

One subsequent policy shift was increasingly to emphasize acquisition of *British*, rather than international, material. Particularly significant was the decision to collect television, setting the Archive apart from many other national film collections. The Archive's earlier decision to represent nonfiction film had similarly distinguished it from fellow archives mainly concerned with features. Both decisions properly reflect the special importance of these forms to Britain's moving image industry and culture, and a commitment to film not only as cultural expression but also as historical record.

The Archive's moving image collection today encompasses some 350,000 titles. Of these, 200,000 are television programmes, most recorded off-air under statutory arrangements with broadcasters. Of the remaining non-broadcast film and video holdings roughly 50,000 titles

2 According to a leading expert in artists' film: 'The On-line database of the AHRB British Artists Film & Video Study Collection at Central Saint Martins suggests that of the listed 5418 (key) works [in these genres] by British artists made between 1924 and 2004, only 415 are held by the NFTVA.' David Curtis, e-mail to the author.

are feature films or other fictional works, while some 100,000 titles fall into the broad categories of documentary or other nonfiction.

This is a collection of extraordinary scale and richness. Given its history, however, it has flaws. The opportunistic approach to collecting has resulted in serious gaps: key titles missing, or preserved at compromised quality; entire genres, careers or eras underrepresented. One illustration of this would be experimental and artists' film and video: an undeniably rich and relevant strain of British film culture, it is, however, seriously underrepresented in the nation's film collection.² Of even greater concern, the Archive largely lacks both the technical and cultural expertise to have properly embraced the emerging cultural forms of digital and web-distributed filmmaking.

These cultural weaknesses have ironically been exacerbated by the very durability of the Archive's core structure, designed to meet its initial needs and priorities. For many years the Archive has been divided up into numerous discrete curatorial and technical functions. Diffusion of knowledge across different functional groups makes it difficult to prioritize work on the collection in culturally consistent, effective or transparent ways. Meanwhile, access has continued to be compromised by restrictive deposit agreements, as well as by certain inefficient internal processes, despite an increasing emphasis on access to certain user groups in recent years.

Most alarmingly, the National Audit Office revealed that despite the longstanding emphasis on preservation, the collection is at serious physical risk. Subsequent study has confirmed this in further detail. Vault conditions vary, but the majority of the film collection is deteriorating to some degree due to poor environmental storage conditions (thankfully, the conditions in which the television and other predominantly video collections are held are generally much better). In the worst vaults the average remaining expected lifespan for current holdings is as low as fourteen years. This is a physical problem, but it is also, of course, a cultural problem.

Indeed, the Archive Review's key contention was that while long-term underinvestment has played a crucial role, so serious an infrastructural failure cannot be explained solely in terms of funding. The Archive had not made a strong enough cultural case over the years, as the prerequisite for securing such financial support. Its successes have too often been measured numerically – millions of feet duplicated; tens of thousands of cans examined; thousands of viewing prints serviced. These are not failures of accomplishment – they attest to the dedication of the staff of one of the most active, hardworking archives in the world. They *are* failures in explaining the cultural, social and historical significance of the Archive. Such an explanation must depend on a deeper and more public interpretation of the collection, not just of its physical properties but of the narrative(s) of national life and of moving image history which are embedded within it.

The proposals made by the Archive Review were thus based on two irrefutable propositions:

- Future increases in funding depend on developing a compelling cultural case, based on exploring the collection's meaning and potential, both for film culture and for the wider community.
- In the meantime, scarce resources must be prioritized in order best to manage the collection from its current state.

The proposals: physical and intellectual curation

The Archive Review emphasizes improved *curation* – meaning a consolidation of collections by prioritizing acquisition, preservation, research, documentation, interpretation and dissemination of archive holdings according to a systematic, informed and responsible view of their UK cultural and heritage significance. This is a somewhat different version of the curatorial than that which has prevailed previously (with its emphasis on discrete functions over a unified approach to content). It does, however, clearly contain both physical *and* intellectual components.

Confronted, like the NAO, by some of the Archive's worst vaults, it is difficult to argue against the Review's insistence on a relative shift of available resource from duplication as the *primary* plank of preservation strategy towards high-quality storage, supplemented by duplication as required. Resources have been pledged to the lengthy process of understanding the state of current vaults while introducing emergency measures to remove material from the worst environments (vaults at risk of flooding or with humidity levels close to 100%). This has commenced and has a projected completion date of January 2006. This must be a sounder option than heroic attempts at printing our way out of such storage problems. Indeed, given the sheer scale of the collection, printing our way out would either take several centuries or require an unrealistic increase of investment of fifty or a hundred times above current levels. In any case, making new preservation elements only to put them into compromised storage conditions would be somewhat futile.

Such *physical curation* alone is insufficient, however. It must be accompanied by *intellectual curation*. To this end, a Curatorial Unit is to be set up, merging currently autonomous curatorial functions. Over time, this new team will be divided into specific curatorial categories reflecting the richness of the Archive's collecting remit. Rather than recognizing only the broad categories of fiction, nonfiction and television, in future each member of curatorial staff will be responsible for specific areas. These include newsreel and cinemagazines; early film; political and campaigning film and video; animation; documentary; advertising; television drama; educational, instructional and lifestyle programming; amateur film, and so on. The task of such curators will be to ensure that within each category, priorities are set and met across all of the archival

functions. They will also research, and act as advocates for, their curatorial specialisms – much as museum and gallery curators are expected to do, and, like them, forging links with experts outside the institution.

This approach pragmatically recognizes that different moving image categories have different curatorial needs, too easily unmet if nobody is specifically responsible for them. We have seen that in some areas the primary need is for proactive acquisition. In other areas – say, Victorian and Edwardian film – most surviving material is held by the Archive and preservation work has been done, but there is scope for much more material to be made available digitally. In others, there are pressing preservation needs.

For all their pragmatic merits, underlying these ideas is an ideological shift in how the archivist's role in relation to the wider culture is conceived. This shift has already occurred at some other archives.³ Rather than archiving being seen primarily as a physical and administrative task, it is reconceptualized as fundamentally an intellectual cultural project carried out by physical and administrative means. The development of an internal research culture will enable the body of knowledge built up by archivists over years of working with the collections to be recognized and exploited properly. Development of such knowledge should be seen as a core function rather than an add-on. Furthermore, it should inform all other core functions so that every decision with cultural effects – what is acquired, how it is documented, what should be prioritized for preservation and access – is driven by systematically cultivated expertise.

The most exciting archival projects may combine all of a collection's curatorial needs. The recently completed Mitchell and Kenyon project is seen as a partial model for the Archive's new working methods. The acquisition of this collection of eight-hundred Edwardian actuality films led to coordinated curatorial activity encompassing cataloguing, preservation, restoration and digitization. In turn these led to outputs designed for impact both on film culture (a publication examining the collection from a variety of scholarly perspectives) and on the wider community (a television programme coproduced with the BBC, which was broadcast in January 2005). Key to the project was academic research collaboration with the University of Sheffield.⁴

It is hoped that such research projects bridging the archival and academic sectors will become increasingly common. Britain's screen history is far richer and open to more interpretations than is generally understood. Increasing the scope for intellectual collaboration between archivists and scholars can only be to the ultimate benefit of both communities. For instance, an as yet unwritten history of screen advertising, crossing the boundaries of cinema and television, could begin to be constructed from the BFI National Film and Television Archive's collection. To give a very different example, the hundreds of public record films preserved by the Archive should constitute Exhibit A

³ For instance, the Nederlands Film museum has developed an increasingly curatorially organized structure emphasizing scholarly interpretation of its collections, and particularly of its lesser-known parts.

⁴ For further information, see www.bfi.org.uk/collection/mk, and the resources to which it refers.

5 The Archive is a designated preservation agent for The National Archives (formerly The Public Record Office) in relation to film and video made by government departments and agencies selected for permanent heritage retention under the Public Records Act, 1958.

6 Clearly, these areas of the collection are offered as examples. For further information on the overall scope of the collection, see www.movinghistory.ac.uk, an AHRB website which introduces the collections of all the UK's public sector film archives to the academic community. Those sections dealing with the BFI National Film and Television Archive were written by some of its staff; an example of the sort of interpretive work which increasingly will be encouraged in future.

in any study of the history of film and video sponsorship by the British state.⁵ Related to this, forty years of the National Coal Board's film output is preserved in its entirety by the Archive, and complementing this are numerous other collections of material funded by public and private industry, together prompting important questions: What is the true significance of this practice of industrial filmmaking? What role did it play in Britain's film industry? What mix of messages were conveyed by the content preserved in archives, and what cultural and political influence did it have on a wider audience at the height of the UK's postwar consensus? How was this prevalent cultural form affected by the breakdown of that consensus coinciding with the increasing switch from 16 mm to video as the primary medium for sponsored film? Are there publicly or corporately sponsored digital productions being made today which genuinely echo these antecedents, and which should in turn be archived as part of tomorrow's film heritage?⁶

In the television sphere, the shift to the curatorial model is being particularly carefully planned so as to mesh with technological developments. Digital recording will enable all transmitted material from selected channels to be captured and made available not only to users but also to the curatorial staff, who can then review the material in order to make the best-informed decisions as to what should go forward for long-term preservation. At the moment, preservation selection has to be undertaken in advance of transmission using listings information only.

Similarly in the film preservation areas, the Archive laboratory will change in line with technological developments. While film duplication will still occur when deemed necessary for preservation, the focus for access will be on making digital materials. Among other things, this should enable many more titles to become more readily available for viewing, particularly those in the less-explored nonfiction genres, and titles which have never been at major risk of deterioration and have ironically therefore remained inaccessible. The focus for in-house film preservation work will be high-quality (and high-profile) restorations that cannot be done elsewhere: *Piccadilly* (1929) and *Kipps* (1921), and indeed Mitchell and Kenyon, are recent examples of brilliant work undertaken by the Archive's technical specialists. As in the curatorial area there will be some pooling of existing skills in the interests of flexibility and improved planning, but what is most important is to recognize such technical work as at the heart of a cultural process.

These plans are radical and ambitious and they will not be achieved overnight. It is not surprising that they have been interpreted as controversial. Even while still in the early stages of internal discussion, leaked documents led to an anonymous website petition being set up to campaign against changes at the Archive. Many criticisms were based on misinterpretations.

For instance, it was claimed that the Archive would in future only acquire material for which it could secure full commercial exploitation

7 An example of such collaboration is a recently commenced project to collect, preserve and make available the entire surviving output of Coca-Cola's British advertising, entirely funded by Coca-Cola. See Louise Jury, 'Best-sellers: the art of screen advertising', *The Independent*, 30 November 2004. As the article suggests, this project provides the seed funding that could enable the more comprehensive study of screen advertising as a generic category suggested above.

8 Essentially, I am arguing here against the notion that moving image archiving can ever be an entirely culturally neutral activity, particularly as the sheer scale and variety of moving image production continues to increase exponentially. However, it must be noted that the use of 'cultural significance' as a proposed acquisition criterion was also misunderstood. This referred to the significance of material under consideration in relation to UK culture; it was not meant to equate to subjective notions of artistic merit. The Archive's recent collectively-authored Collecting Policy actually offers more detail than ever before on what the Archive will collect and why (given that it replaces a 2000 document which was less detailed, and which in turn replaced a non-existent document), and should be consulted by anyone concerned by claims of a narrowing of the collection's focus based on subjectivity.

rights. The actual proposal was that usage rights should be *one of several* issues considered when assessing material for possible acquisition. It is in the direct interest of users (the public) that future donor agreements, where possible, no longer restrict off-premises access. And where they do, it is reasonable that major donors increasingly consider sharing the costs of preserving their commercial assets with the taxpayer. Improving collaborative relationships between public archives and the holders of rights is key to making our moving image heritage more widely available.⁷

The campaign expressed particularly vociferous opposition to any modification of traditional notions of curation. It is hard to understand the objection to cultural and technical prioritization being set by curatorial staff – an idea that would be uncontroversial elsewhere in heritage management. We have seen that in the absence of such an approach, cultural biases have resulted in the Archive's collection. Acquisition that is largely reactive and not always driven by specific subject expertise has resulted in a collection that does not fully represent national film heritage. Similar unconscious cultural biases might be discerned in the petition, given its frequent references to silent cinema, and the absence of any meaningful references to television, let alone contemporary digital production. Prioritizing work either by technical preservation needs or by access requests has also resulted in inevitable biases in what is available for use, while chemical processes at work in poor-quality vaults cause random cultural biases in what is adequately preserved.⁸

It is difficult to find positive proposals in such campaigns, beyond the demand that the Archive be better funded. I have argued that this proposition is irrefutable but, by itself, unhelpful. The question is *how* to bring this about, and I have suggested that the makings, at least, of an answer have been sketched out in the steps towards reorientation now being taken by the Archive. While much initial emphasis is on pragmatic, affordable steps to secure the collection – an emphasis which has entailed some tough decisions about priorities – the ultimate objective is to secure a place in cultural life for the Archive which is comparable to that enjoyed by other national cultural institutions.

Still, it is impossible to deny that feelings are currently raw. Many infer from the extent of the changes demanded of the Archive a criticism of its past practice. But this inference need not be made. Conversely, for those prepared to implement these changes believing that they are in the interests of the collection and its users, the implication that they are lesser archivists than their predecessors and critics is not unlike being criticized for being a bad parent.

But we know that parenting is never an easy option. Taking responsibility for facing up to its difficult choices is risky and sometimes utterly exhausting. Yet its rewards can be incalculable. It is a long-term commitment whose value can ultimately be judged only by the grown adults it produces. In the years to come, it will become clear whether or not the changes outlined in this article will have been to the ultimate

benefit of national heritage. In the meantime, I hope that we and our critics can firmly agree that we share at least one passionate belief: that archiving, like parenting, is above all else an act of love.

I would like to thank those colleagues who provided comments on this piece, particularly Steve Bryant, Margaret Deriaz, Andrea Kalas and Heather Stewart.

Grahame Smith, *Dickens and the Dream of Cinema*. New York, NY and Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, 206 pp.

John Glavin (ed.), *Dickens on Screen*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 225 pp.

CHRISTINE GERAGHTY

If it is the case, as James Naremore asserts, that the ‘very subject of adaptation has constituted one of the most *jejeune* areas of scholarly writing about the cinema’,¹ then these two books on Dickens and cinema provide more ammunition against those who persist in measuring the success of adaptations in terms of faithfulness to the original source. In a British context, perhaps, in which *Literature/Film Quarterly* throws a weaker shadow, the challenge to the fidelity paradigm has been stronger; readers familiar with the collections edited by Imelda Whelehan and Deborah Cartmell or, more broadly, debates about the use of the past and its literature as both a construction and a resource for British film and television, will readily concede that fidelity is not the only or the most productive criterion.² There are, indeed, many films in which the notional literary source (whether it be a forgotten bestseller or the title of a short story, as Hitchcock claimed with *The Birds* [1963]) is not generally a point of comparison, so adaptations of the classics should be taken as a particular case rather than treated as the dominating model. And, as these two books demonstrate, Dickens and the adaptations of his work continue to provide a fascinating and rich object of study in their own right and as a way of opening up further debates about film adaptations.

Graeme Smith’s *Dickens and the Dream of Cinema* positions itself at the intersection between literary criticism, cultural history and film theory. Its achievement is to weave together images, descriptions, metaphors and analysis into a theoretical account which is as pleasurable as it is illuminating. Writing with an irrepressible conviction of Dickens’s stature, which sent this reader at least back to both the novels

¹ James Naremore, ‘Introduction: film and the reign of adaptation’, in James Naremore (ed.), *Film Adaptation* (London: Athlone Press, 2000), p. 1.

² See for instance Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (eds), *Adaptations From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (London: Routledge, 1999), or more generally the work of Pam Cook, Sue Harper and Andrew Higson, among others.

and the films, Smith takes the dream as his central trope, linking the popular and theoretical association of cinema with fantasy and daydreams to Dickens's own use of dreaming as a metaphor for life itself and Water Benjamin's aphorism about the 'dream in which every epoch sees in images the epoch which is to succeed it' (p. 16). Smith is thus not just dealing with Dickens's relationship with films, as evidenced by the many adaptations inspired by his work, nor with his writing as a precursor of cinematic techniques, as famously suggested by Eisenstein. These factors were, he argues, part of a broader transformation in which Dickens's dream of cinema helps to bring cinema into existence so that 'his work played some part, however small, in the cultural and material movements and transformations that eventually made it [cinema] possible' (p. 10). Dickens takes into himself some of the central developments of nineteenth-century technology and culture – the interest in visual technologies, for instance, or the impact of urbanization and of the railway – and gives them literary form in a way which makes them open to a new kind of affective understanding for the huge number of readers attracted to his engagement with popular entertainment. Cinema, then, as indeed early cinema historians have argued, is not just a question of technical developments but of a shift in consciousness, particularly in relation to seeing and movement; and if cinema is (or was) a vibrant popular form, it owes something to Dickens's example of how a 'controlling imagination' could transform the way in which the world was viewed.

Smith admits that the relationship which he is positing between Dickens and cinema is 'contingent rather than necessary, the evidence for it involving not the linear causality which "proves" the connection, but rather an examination of the question from a range of possible angles' (p. 51). The book is therefore a series of overlapping explorations: of the nineteenth-century visual technology with which Dickens engaged in his writing; of the role of London as a labyrinth and Paris as a panorama in Dickens's life and work, linking both to cinema's dependence on movement and light; of his delight in technology and in particular in the spectacular setups of Victorian theatre. Arguments about the fidelity of adaptations become rather redundant faced with Dickens's willingness to adapt his own work in a variety of formats, and Smith, following André Bazin's rejection of the separation of forms (and hence the distinctive and separate tasks of literature, cinema and theatre), celebrates the impurity of Dickens's art. Dickens's commitment to melodrama, with its capacity to make unexpected connections and hold together old and new, is critical here since melodrama has been described as an impure form and one which led into the democratic and affecting modes of silent cinema. But Smith also stresses Dickens's 'capacity for rigorous thought' (p. 108), expressed in his novels through character, setting, theme and image. The later novels in particular, he argues, are based on huge structures of imagery – Smith compares them to theatrical and silent film sets – which allow for Dickens's understanding of the economic and social processes to be expressed in fictional form. Throughout, there is an

3 Smith's source for Bazin's essay, 'Adaptation, or the cinema as digest', in Naremore (ed.), *Film Adaptation*.

emphasis on language and writing and, in the final chapter, Smith suggests that the emphasis on movement and process in Dickens's writing, the 'continuously unfolding movement of his prose' (p. 163), cries out for actualization in mise-en-scene as much as the jumps and parallelisms which prefigure montage.

Although Smith holds no brief for judgments which take us up 'the cul-de-sac of fidelity to the original' (p. 122), that does not mean that he eschews evaluation. Nor indeed does he entirely abandon the notion of a relationship between different versions of a work, preferring to look for what Bazin called 'the equivalence in meaning of the forms' (p. 122)³ and in particular for an equivalence for the structural imagery and parallel action which provide the spectacular means through which Dickens expresses his complex engagement with society. In this respect, Smith favours Lean's *Oliver Twist* (1948) over his *Great Expectations* (1946). The narrative reorganization and the stylistic richness of the former film mimic Dickens's total command of fictional technique to such good effect that *Oliver Twist*, Smith suggests, is now 'an amalgam of book and film in which both have contributed to our sense of the mixed final product' (p. 130). By contrast, Christine Edzard's *Little Dorrit* (1987) is criticized for its emphasis on linear progression, its lack of 'a sense of panorama' (p. 144) and the flat surface created by the camerawork, lighting and mise-en-scene. Smith discusses Dickens as a writer whose work 'is continually dangerous in its social and personal implications, and in its form' (p. 149). By adopting a restrained style which emphasizes historical reconstruction, Edzard denies the self-reflexive virtuosity of Dickens's techniques and the possibility of finding an equivalence for the dangers of his writing. Indeed, Smith, applying this evaluative approach which has its roots in questions of fidelity, finds that Dickens has been less well served than Shakespeare, with few adaptations successfully picking up the challenge.

The collection of essays and articles in *Dickens on Screen* has points of crossover and connections with Smith's book. A number of contributors, for instance, share his interest in Lean's *Oliver Twist*; Garrett Stewart's brilliant essay, 'Dickens, Eisenstein, film', in particular, emphasizes Dickens's dialectical drive and the 'governing filmic energy' (p. 143) of his technique through a detailed analysis of Dickens's language set against examples from the 1948 version. Kamilla Elliott, on the other hand, challenges those literary critics who claim Dickens as the ancestor of cinema, though perhaps Smith's more subtle and wide-ranging arguments would escape this censure. And Marguerite Rippey's account of why Orson Welles did not make *The Pickwick Papers* contrasts with Smith's epilogue in which he draws parallels between the two figures and dreams the fusion of their talents.

More generally, the editor of the collection John Glavin wants, like Naremore, to escape, from questions of fidelity, polemically asserting that the collection 'is likely to seem not just strange but *very* strange to a reader who thinks that adaptation is supposed to copy an original reliably . . . and with respect' (p. 1). Working through this, Glavin argues

4 Given the US emphasis, it is probably appropriate that the 'Oliver' chosen for the cover illustration is Jackie Coogan from the US 1922 version rather than John Howard Davis.

that adaptations disrupt rather than copy 'fiction' (presumably novels, though this is an odd distinction to use with regard to fiction films); that film, now the dominant ground for fiction, has its own forms and rhythms; that many Dickens films are not characterized by the montage praised by Eisenstein; and that 'the Dickens film now shapes Dickens's fiction' (p. 5) so that the novels no longer come first in the process of creating meaning. More controversial, perhaps, for non-US writers on cinema is the claim that 'although Dickens novels are indisputably British, *the Dickens film* must be, largely, an American topic, since film is, largely, an American topic' (p. 7).⁴ I was therefore rather pleased that Lean's British films (but perhaps by this logic they are American), as well as three Australian television versions of *Great Expectations*, sneaked in as the subject of interesting analysis. But the comment seems to refer to the nationality of most of the contributors and perhaps also explains a certain lack of social context, which I discuss below.

In general, the challenge of the collection is the way in which it goes beyond academic sources for its contributors and the wide range of references, analogies and comparisons the authors draw on to discuss Dickens. The first section consists of a roundtable discussion (with the murder of Nancy in Lean's *Oliver Twist* as the starting point) among film critics, literary critics and psychotherapists, which explores Freudian and post-Freudian readings. The second section, given over to essays by literary critics, is striking for the wide range of connections made between Dickens adaptations and other films. Murray Baumgarten, for instance, suggests that *Groundhog Day* (1993) is 'truer to the central themes' (fidelity is hard to escape from) of *A Christmas Carol* than *Scrooged* (1988), while Robert M. Polhemus discusses stardust memories and screen memory in Dickens and Woody Allen. Section three is devoted to practitioners: scriptwriter John Romano (who also makes an interesting contribution to the roundtable discussion in section one), actress Miriam Margolyes and director Alfonso Cuarón, whose 1998 *Great Expectations* is rather harshly treated elsewhere in the book (problems of fidelity again?). In section four, film academics contribute essays which push intelligently against the boundaries of work on Dickens and on film adaptations more generally. Section five gives information about some film and television adaptations made from Dickens's work.

Naremore, in seeking to move theoretical work on screen adaptations forward, suggests that we need 'a broader definition of adaptation and a sociology that takes into account the commercial apparatus, the audience, and the academic culture industry'.⁵ This collection certainly responds to the pleas for broader definition but a sense of audience, industry and social context is more limited. For all that the 1948 *Oliver Twist* emerges as an exemplary text, there is little reference to its context in postwar British society/film industry or to the striking changes in the representation of Oliver which Jeffrey Richards links to changes in cultural context.⁶ For me, it is the essays in section four which most

5 Naremore (ed.), *Film Adaptation*, p. 10.

6 See Jeffrey Richards, 'Dickens: our contemporary', in *Films and British National Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

strongly draw on a wider range of analytical tools, whether Steve J. Wurtzler's account of how *David Copperfield* (1935) was incorporated into the school curriculum or Jeffrey Sconce's deft contrast of the same film with *South Park*'s irreverent episode 'Pip'. But it may be that the limited space necessarily offered by the collection format militates against more detailed work of this kind.

Smith, of course, has the luxury of a monograph, and while both books are valuable and challenging it is his which stands as a complete work in its own right. Indeed, one has a sense that Smith's book provides an instance of the very constructions he is describing, both inside and outside the Dickens corpus. The controlling metaphor, the structural image of the dream, is conjured up through productive juxtapositions (Wallace Stevens and Walter Benjamin, Alasdair Gray and *The Arabian Nights*). It offers a panorama, rich in unexpected detail and wide in range; its style is inextricably linked to its thought; it builds up an edifice by circling around to fit a brick here, a feather there; and if sometimes the argument works through analogy and rhetoric rather than proof, then that augments rather than diminishes the pleasures of the journey.

Jon Burrows, *Legitimate Cinema: Theatre Stars in Silent British Films, 1908–1918*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2003, 278 pp.

Christine Gledhill, *Reframing British Cinema 1918–1928: Between Restraint and Passion*. London: British Film Institute, 2003, 214 pp.

Michael Williams, *Ivor Novello: Screen Idol*. London: British Film Institute, 2003, 193 pp.

SARAH STREET

It is a pleasure to review three books published in 2003 on silent British cinema that together offer such an extensive reevaluation of a period hitherto broadly interpreted as aesthetically conservative, stagebound and lacking dynamism when compared to Hollywood or European art cinema. Burrows, Gledhill and Williams ensure that we will never look at early British cinema in quite the same way again: adaptations of Shakespeare can no longer be dismissed as crude, unadventurous examples of ‘filmed theatre’; the legacy of nineteenth-century popular forms will be not be understood as simply anachronistic; and the study of silent British film stars now has an impressive model that draws on a wide range of contextual sources. Several factors have encouraged this revisionist trend: the annual Silent Cinema weekend events at the Broadway cinema, Nottingham, that have fostered a lively culture of scholarly exchange and have regularly featured themes on British cinema; the influence of US silent cinema scholarship; and more general developments in Film Studies towards multisource-based, intertextual approaches.

In the first book to be published on British cinema in the 1910s for over fifty years, Jon Burrows has produced an impressive study of the use and impact of theatre stars who appeared in British films during a crucial period, 1908–18. Drawing on and extending the idea of ‘intermediality’ proposed by André Gaudreault,¹ the book evaluates crosscultural exchanges between theatre and film so that instead of interpreting the

1 André Gaudreault, ‘The diversity of cinematographic connections in the intermedial context of the turn of the century’, in Simon Popple and Vanessa Toulmin (eds), *Visual Delights: Essays on the Popular and Projected Images in the 19th Century* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 2000).

high level of involvement of theatre actors in British films as backward-looking and neglectful of developing 'the cinematic', we understand the relations between theatre and film as a process of productive exchange and mutual transformation. Stage actors' interest in film was not just as a means of 'cashing in' on opportunities promised by the commercial exploitation of new technology, but presented them with new audiences they had already attracted in music-hall productions. Indeed, the link with commercial developments in music-hall entertainment emerges in Burrows' analysis as a key precedent that in many ways eased the path for actors who were willing to straddle careers on the stage and screen. While restraint and moderation had come to be appreciated as the dominant theatrical style at the turn of the century, the increasing popularity of film required actors to experiment with different methods of playing to the camera, some more successful than others.

In a series of case-studies, Burrows takes us through these contrasting practices, beginning with the relatively shortlived adaptation of pantomime techniques evident in European *Films d'Art* to British adaptations of Shakespeare, 1908–11. What was particularly significant about these productions was their spectacular rather than restrained style; while not quite right as vehicles for cinematic experimentation, they provided a good example of how complex texts could nevertheless be directed at, and understood by, a growing mass audience. Burrows goes on to discuss the context for the more sustained and successful evolution of 'character actors' (such as Will Evans), who maintained an interest in gestural performance and whose experience was more likely to have been gained in the music hall than in 'legitimate theatre'. On the other hand, the film production of *Hamlet* (1913), performed by distinguished stage actor Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson who was renowned for his application of 'modern' acting techniques of naturalism and restraint, was less successful because while the camera did not require as much obvious facial expression or bodily movement as a stage performance, it was nevertheless more suited to capturing an active register of gestural performance that was neither minimalist nor 'histrionic'. This research correlates with that of Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, who argue that in American silent cinema melodramatic codes were not necessarily crude or overblown and that the most appropriate for cinema were rather more 'gesturally demonstrative' than has hitherto been appreciated.² In this way, acting styles evolved in response to the creative and dynamic intermedial exchange that was taking place between theatre, music hall and film.

Burrows concludes his book with a case-study of Ideal Films, one of the most successful British film companies of the war years that employed stage actors and produced 'quality' adaptations. In many ways these represented the dominant direction of British cinema in its desire to offer films that would appeal to high- and lower-class patrons, nurturing a middle-ground, 'middlebrow' culture that was to dominate in the interwar years. But even this company's history shows that producers

² Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

who neglected the persistent demand for popular entertainment that bore relation to past (but continually present) traditions of spectacle and gestural performance did so at their peril. In short, *Legitimate Cinema* advances a sophisticated understanding of a neglected period of British cinema and theatre history, dealing with the problems familiar to all historians of silent cinema – lack of surviving prints, the plethora and complexity of divergent sources – with aplomb. The book is well-written and illustrated, including a tantalizing glimpse of all that remains of *Henry VIII* (1911), a reproduction of six negative strips described by *The Sketch* with the endearing language of such contemporary publications as ‘Shakespeare without words: a filmy production’ (p. 64).

Christine Gledhill’s *Reframing British Cinema* takes the story on to the 1920s. Like Burrows, her approach is sympathetic to the need for film historians to examine their terrain in revisionist terms, seeking to understand the 1920s less as a decade of failure, when British cinema failed to match up to Hollywood or demonstrate the sophisticated stylistics of European art cinema, but more as one that should be evaluated on its own terms, as ‘a productive site of multiple, intermingling currents, crossing between past traditions and future practices’ (p. 1). Gledhill’s book promotes a considerable reevaluation of 1920s British cinema, drawing on features that have conventionally been dismissed as anachronistic – pictorialism, theatricality and adaptation – in a search for the underlying ‘poetics’ of British cinema. In her consideration of these themes, the analysis is nuanced between textual analysis and cumulative theoretical insight. One of the book’s key observations is the filmic deployment of ‘social spaces’ that were delineated by their class inflections and linked to theatrical modes of performance that clearly demarked ‘private’ and ‘public’ spaces. In this way, films such as *The Rat* (1925) and *Underground* (1928) illustrate how the range of different locales made possible by filmic representation enabled different social spaces to be juxtaposed, as socially-coded characters often moved between different environments. Considered as a response to modernity, many British films of the 1920s can therefore be read for their production of ‘social mapping’ in which ‘initially geographically demarcated’ characters are brought into ‘contact rather than confrontation, working towards negotiated cohesion across the boundaries of difference rather than engineering the ejection of class-challenging figures’ (p. 26). While it is difficult to assess the impact of such representations on contemporary audiences, Gledhill’s textually-based observations are certainly suggestive of the possibility of socially-coded contexts of viewing that may have anticipated the dominant ‘consensus’ mode of 1930s British cinema and politics identified by Jeffrey Richards and Anthony Aldgate.³

As other historians of early British cinema have argued, pictorialism is a key distinguishing feature that permits something approaching a nationally specific (although one must be careful here until more

3 Antony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *The Best of British: Cinema and Society, 1930–1970* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).

4 Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

comparative analysis has been undertaken) aesthetic. Drawing on the approach of Martin Meisel,⁴ Gledhill analyzes the effects of pictorial framing, as well as the evolution of cinematic devices such as masks and the arrangement of sets to produce internal framing effects. While usually interpreted as the opposite to seamless continuity, in Gledhill's study the pictorial cinematic style emerges instead as a fascinating arena that draws on existing styles that evolved from theatre and narrative painting. As demonstrated in her analysis of Cecil Hepworth's *The Pipes of Pan* (1923) this often facilitated a situation's aesthetic and emotional effects. As she explains:

Hepworth's frontal camera and pictorial framing, while inhibiting immersion in the three-dimensional space of a narrativised world, fosters our relationship with a picture, which is rarely encountered in isolation and exists as a kind of public statement. In film, 'living' pictures means 'moving' figures, and frames that are composed, as it were, by the shake of the kaleidoscope that scatters the figures, breaking and reconfiguring pictorial patterns. (p. 95)

As a consequence of this aesthetic, the 'heritage' mode that is so often interpreted as conservative nostalgia emerges as a rather more eclectic process of 'acculturation', whereby cinema drew on a variety of preexisting modes including folklore, fairytales, country dancing and harlequinade.

Reframing British Cinema certainly lives up to its title with its reevaluation of figures like Hepworth, Graham Guts, Maurice Elvey and Alfred Hitchcock. Maurice Elvey's style of 'pictorial narration', for example, demonstrates how pictorial filmmaking could also serve the demands of complex narrative development producing, as in *Mademoiselle d'Armentières* (1926), 'collaged' images to progress narrative that Gledhill compares to a 'flicker book' technique that is similar to Soviet montage. She concludes that during this period British cinema ought to be understood as part of a larger culture of 'realisation, recycling, adaptation, deploying existing artefacts and cultural practices as material for new configurations' (p. 181). This dynamic aesthetic combination was particularly distinctive, showing how in the 1920s there were many different competing storytelling techniques that departed from the Hollywood model. It would have been interesting if this approach had been extended to include further reference to cross-fertilization between pictorial modes and broader developments in European cinema technique, made possible by the increasingly transnational nature of cinema (especially at the end of the 1920s), with its geographically mobile directors and technicians who had experience of working in several different countries.

Michael Williams's *Ivor Novello: Screen Idol* continues this process of revisionism and refinement. Like Burrows and Gledhill he is writing against the grain of accepted orthodoxy. While generally viewed as one of Britain's most popular film stars of the 1920s, Novello's film career

has not been subject to detailed analysis, past biographers preferring instead to privilege his theatre work. As well as providing a close study of films such as *The Rat*, *The Lodger* (1926) and *Downhill* (1927), the distinctive approach taken by Williams affords an appreciation of Novello as an icon of his time, as a symbol of postwar trauma and national mourning. Williams draws productively on Friedrich Nietzsche's discussion of Greek drama, in which he located the coexistence of beauty (Apollo) and horror (Dionysus), as a model for viewing Novello as representative of the pale-faced, beautiful figure who simultaneously is racked by tragedy and guilt. While Novello's reputation as a war hero is based on the fact that he composed one of the most successful popular wartime songs, 'Keep the Home Fires Burning', Williams argues that this is somewhat undercut by his 'queer' identity and sexuality that was alluded to but seldom directly addressed in contemporary reviews. In films such as *The Lodger* this ambiguity – the Apollo figure nevertheless surrounded by guilt and suspicion – is thus given a new contextual meaning. Williams's inclusive and wide-ranging intertextual methodology is very useful in demonstrating the richness of contemporary commentary about Novello and the extent to which it suggests new insights into the persona and impact of this important and complex star. The most fascinating chapters are when Novello is placed in the context of postwar trauma, war-neurosis, shell-shock and 'queer' (or in contemporary terms incomplete) masculinity. As Williams explains: 'In Novello's films, it is not only war but also repressed or frustrated sexuality that informs his narratives of male emotion being traumatised and made "queer"' (p. 132). Far from being an anachronistic or vacuously nostalgic figure, Novello thus emerges as a curiously modern icon who is very much representative of his era, with all its tensions around modernity, sexuality, disillusionment and melancholy. While comparisons with Rudolph Valentino and Ramon Novarro have frequently been made (as early as 1924 when *Picturegoer* proclaimed them to be 'the eternal triangle'), Williams's thoroughly researched book urges us to see Novello as a very culturally specific icon who despite being a popular matinee idol nevertheless 'stands as a polysemic composite, a symbol for the "war generation"' (p. 88).

In their different ways all three books therefore present key research and insights into silent British cinema. A common thread is their debt to studies of melodrama in popular film and theatre, a dominant strand in silent cinema research during recent years, and to a growing interest in cinematic performance styles. As with most advances on previous scholarship, each is suggestive of yet further areas for productive investigation. Burrows's book gives us glimpses of what might be possible when further work has been completed on the impact of fluctuating exhibition structures during the pre-World War I years and into the economics of the early film industry more generally. While conventional film histories often separate economic from cultural or textual concerns, *Legitimate Cinema* demonstrates the dynamics of their

crucial interdependence. In its detailed textual scrutiny of 1920s British cinema, *Reframing British Cinema* points to the need for further research into popular audience tastes in the silent period as well as into the impact of transnational practices within British cinema. Finally, Williams's study of Novello serves as a good example of what can be gained by broadening out the parameters of star studies, pointing towards further work on popular stars of the 1920s. With such a rich triumvirate of books appearing in 2003, it is likely that the revisionist process will continue to enliven British cinema studies for many years to come.

Sean Cubitt, *The Cinema Effect*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004, 455 pp.

LAURA U. MARKS

The Cinema Effect is an intellectual rollercoaster ride – expansive, inspiring, and apt to leave you a little dizzy. Sean Cubitt proposes to rewrite the entire history of cinema from a digital perspective. This digital hindsight places the book in the company of Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media*, but Cubitt's argument sweeps in a different direction: photographic cinema is not dismissed as a blip in the history of painting to be made obsolete by the coming of numeric media (as Manovich argued), but has qualities which inhabit both the analogue and the digital. Cubitt proposes a basic distinction between three elements that bridge analogue and digital cinema: pixel, cut and vector.

Three, you say? Yes – Cubitt structures the principles of cinema according to Charles Sanders Peirce's philosophy of the endlessly evolving triad, with results that are always provocative and mostly productive. Cubitt remains indebted to Gilles Deleuze's application of Peircean semiotics to the cinema, although his fundamental categories of pixel, cut and vector are new. By pixel Cubitt does not mean the basic element of computer display, but the smallest sample of filmed movement: a frame. The frame samples time, or, as Cubitt puts it, establishes a difference between past and future. The pixel has qualities of Firstness as it is the initiating moment of sensation. The state of Firstness is constantly simmering and moving; it corresponds to the 'zero' that represents not nothingness but latency, a point of equilibrium. Zero is a result in time: of the classical film scene which ends once every prop has been used; or of the expenditure and profit for a commercial movie. Cubitt's virtuoso formal and historical analysis of *La Sortie des usines Lumière* explicates the sense of hovering at the origin of an event characteristic of the pixel.

Cubitt describes the dreamlike, immersive qualities of the pixel cinema so enticingly that one can imagine staying there forever (writing, for example, theses on the pixel nature of Tarkovsky's cinema). But in the vigorous flow of the Peircean dialectic one cannot linger at the First forever. Cinema's ontology is to move, in an endless dynamic that resolves (but does not stop) at zero. Narrative works against this dynamic, attempting to institute identity. Movement in time is not necessarily narrative, Cubitt argues; narrative comes later, with the cut that establishes difference, identity and subjectivity. If the pixel corresponds to nondifferentiation, the cut (identified with Secondness), because it renders space an object, corresponds to identity, fixity and difference. In early cinema Cubitt identifies the cut with the magician-filmmakers Georges Méliès and the Indian pioneer Dadasaheb Phalke.

What cinematic quality remains, you ask, that corresponds to Peirce's Thirdness and has qualities of – you guessed it – becoming? Thirdness, according to Cubitt, signifies sociality, creativity and communication, and in cinema an openness that requires the presence of an audience to complete the creative act. Cubitt retrofits a term from computer graphics for this one: the vector. Enamoured of its life-giving qualities, he overlooks the bellicose origins of vector graphics in the development of radar during World War II. The vector is a line that is always in the process of becoming, which Cubitt identifies in the animations, circa 1908, of Emile Cohl. A line that is always remaking its content, defined by process, 'governed', Cubitt writes with typical idealism, 'by hope' (p. 80).

You may be saying to yourself: 'This is a lot of social significance to attribute to a free-wheeling line, however abstract!' But the vector does not imply a strictly formal quality. Nor does it describe an exclusively discursive quality, such as narrative. Rather, it seems to me, the vector indicates a process of becoming that in cinema is inextricably both formal and discursive; it is a plastic force. The beauty of Cubitt's writing, at its best, is that it captures the plasticity of cinema in which the audiovisual image, movement, body, narrative, physicality of the medium, back story, and sociopolitical setting all take part. For example, in Cubitt's analysis of Sam Peckinpah, vortical, self-destructive violence is the result of an inward-turned vector that 'shifts from the macroscopic, universalist spiral of Eisenstein toward a microscopic dissection of the impossibility of freedom' (p. 215) – for reasons as much of the Vietnam War as of editing.

Pixel, cut, and vector are innocent forms during early cinema. It is the social relations of so-called normative cinemas of the 1930s that enact the 'revenge of the apparatus' on the cinema's fundamental elements. What should become an open totality gets closed off in the normative cinema, which prefers totality over infinity, spectacle over relationality. Cubitt extends his triadic analysis to Soviet total film, French realist film, and Hollywood film, investigating the weak points that create totality without openness or a whole without hope. Thus he finds that

Alexander Nevsky eradicates the Firstness of raw sound and pure unmotivated perception, and subordinates all filmic elements to what Eisenstein referred to as the film's graphic structure. Well before digital cinema, *Nevsky* 'seeks to replace the world' with its own glorious and sterile universe. To pursue Cubitt's Peircean terms, we would say *Nevsky* attempts to produce an argument (a sign of Thirdness) without synthesizing qualisigns, the signs of affect and unmediated experience. Meanwhile the fetishistic realism of *La Règle du jeu* multiplies the effects of Firstness, of a world perceived but not measured. Renoir's attempt to unify Firstness results in a nihilistic Sublime, in which signification, never entering the social, can only be made meaningful by death. And here Cubitt finds Renoir's compassionate error: 'The fullness of the world that emanates, almost as a scent, from the unfinished *Partie de campagne*, the conceptualization of the world's zero not as negative but as an unstill fullness, is belied by the importance conceded to death as a guarantor of meaning and reality' (p. 150). Cubitt analyzes Renoir's failure along Marxist lines: realism should not content itself with merely witnessing the world but needs to render the world an object, to be constructed and transformed. 'To do so with honesty and honor, the conditions under which art or history are made must be acknowledged' (p. 157).

A refreshing discussion of Hollywood classical cinema, especially the RKO musicals, suggests why these films have the tendency to deflect analysis. Classicism's wholeness is its seamless, superficial artifice, which produces not reference (Secondness) nor meaning (Thirdness) but the shimmering surface of a regressive Firstness. Classical cinema does not become; it desires what it is already. In *Top Hat*, 'We do not want to see Fred Astaire mount Ginger [no indeed!]; we have come to see them dance'.

Incidentally, *The Cinema Effect* is a history of special effects in the cinema. Maintaining that all cinema is a special effect (thus effacing the false concreteness of the analogue–digital and documentary–fiction divides), it yields some fascinating research on this history. You can read about, for example, Arthur Penn's development of the perfect squib, a packet of blood attached to the actor's body and exploded by a small electrical charge, to deliver convincingly gory exit wounds. Cubitt's account of special effects pays special attention to sound, which in contemporary cinema often retains a closer tie to analogue sources than the visual image does – as when the Foley artist for *Terminator 2* reveals that he achieved the uncanny sound of the creature's morph by inverting a can of dog food.

Let me return to how Cubitt incorporates the history of cinema into a digital understanding. All the elements of classical cinema, such as script and composition, result in a set of symmetries that can be analyzed from any angle, as one turns a figurine to admire it. Chronological sequence is not its defining quality but only one of its elements. This nonlinear quality of classical cinema is amplified in the Hollywood neobaroque

blockbuster, which, as in 'gotcha' thrillers like *The Usual Suspects*, invites spectators to respond to not the story but the script. What Cubitt calls neobaroque cinema invites contemplation of its exquisite artifice. The filmic world becomes a fabric, a *matrix*, that can be twisted in different directions. The script is the algorithm giving rise to the narrative, and it is the complexity and subtlety of the script that we are invited to admire. It follows that, using Manovich's database-interface model, Cubitt sees many contemporary films as databases that 'only appear to be narrative' but, as in *Pulp Fiction* and *Memento*, 'are the result of one of many possible rifles through a database of narrative events whose coincidence is more structural or even architectural than temporal' (p. 238).

Cubitt has hit on a strong comparison between contemporary digital cinema and the baroque, following thinkers such as Deleuze and Christine Buci-Glucksmann who draw comparisons between seventeenth- and twentieth-century culture. Then as now, Cubitt argues, the baroque is the art form of an absolute state in a crisis of representation. In the baroque, as in seventeenth-century Spain (and, I would add, ninth-century Sunni Islam), the goal is known in advance; it is how the work arrives at it, developing elaborate variations on a known theme, that is worthy of admiration. The Muslim literary theorist al-Jurjani (d. 1078) said that in all arts and crafts, 'the more widely differed the shape and appearance of their parts are, then the more perfect the harmony achieved between these parts is', the more 'fascinating' and praiseworthy the resulting work will be. 'As we reach the end of a film like *Snake Eyes*', Cubitt writes, 'we should survey the whole plot as if it were a knot garden, a spatial orchestration of events whose specific attraction is its elaboration of narrative premise into pattern, its reorganization of time as space' (p. 223). Indeed, in these films decoupage is replaced by a fluidly mobile camera that dips about the set, constantly reframing, as in *Strange Days* and *Casino*, literally reconstituting temporality as spatiality.

We can understand the spectacular in contemporary cinema in terms of the vector that is unable to move into the open, trapped as a fractal line that draws, ever more complexly, the outline of the void. Cubitt finds fascinating, but ultimately ugly and empty, the neobaroque aesthetics of contemporary digital blockbusters – whose banal intricacy renders almost nostalgically innocent the glossy superficiality of the RKO spectacles of classical Hollywood. To Cubitt's Debordian logic, both classical Hollywood and the neobaroque share the logic of commodity capitalism, as use-value is replaced by communication-value.

Cubitt extends his expansive analysis to the oneiric cinema of Jeunet and Caro and historical revisionist films such as *Once Upon a Time in the West* and *The Navigator*. His critique of cinematic totality concludes with 'cosmopolitan cinema', the cinema that attempts to interpellate a global audience. Yet cosmopolitanism is the option of a mobile elite in a historical time of increasing controls on immigration. 'The cosmopolitan

is at home in the culture of the other, but he does not offer the hospitality of his own home', Cubitt writes; as such, cosmopolitanism is an unethical position, if ethos, in Derrida's etymology, means home and implies hospitality (p. 338). This uneasy phenomenon reminds me of the cinemas made primarily for export – some Iranian cinema, for example – which deliver local images to a global audience. In an extension of the database-like quality he noted as early as the RKO musicals, new digital blockbusters exhaust all the possibilities of cause and effect. Activity in these films is reduced to information, statistics. Causality is destabilized, becomes meaningless. Cubitt's particular materialism, honed in *Digital Aesthetics*, sharpens his critique: digital spectacles cannot conceive of mortality.

Here Cubitt implies that honest Secondness, the causal relations that typify what Deleuze called movement-image cinema, is more progressive than the cosmopolitan digital film. Real causal relations are directed towards an unknown future, and they include chance and the possibility of becoming. The contemporary digital cinema highjacks Thirdness, manufacturing a sublimity that is achieved without effort. The tone of this critique may call to mind the implicit moralism whereby sentiment is 'unearned emotion'. And yes, there is a moralism at work here; but it is not the critique of the individual incapable of fine emotions, so much as of the institutions that produce totalizing universes and invite consumers—audiences to inhabit them. (And who can blame these audiences, when art is more interesting than many people's lives?) Borrowed experience, in the manufactured Thirdness of the digital sublime, does not include the struggle and work that, in lived experience, powers the semiotic process from one to two to three, from pixel to cut to vector. Cubitt's cheery messianism calls up reminders of why life is worth living, and these are the mortal, the material, the unknown.

Evidently the generosity, high stakes and intellectual daring of *The Cinema Effect* moved this reviewer positively. Cubitt's complex and eloquent readings of individual films are masterly efforts to make great cinema matter, by measuring it against a triadic dynamic of growth, social connection and openness. Exquisite plastic analyses combine with revealing historical research into the films' context of production and reception. The first six chapters of the book are thus highly satisfying in themselves. I know that not all readers will appreciate this book as much as I do. The breathless intensity of Cubitt's writing sometimes has one rereading a single sentence numerous times before the one is rewarded with meaning, or not. Sometimes facts get swept away before the expansiveness of Cubitt's inquiry; some attempts at synthesis, such as that between Peircean semiotics and Lacanian psychoanalysis, yield little. But for scholars looking to make new sense of contemporary cinema, special effects and world cinema history itself, *The Cinema Effect* is a ride worth taking.